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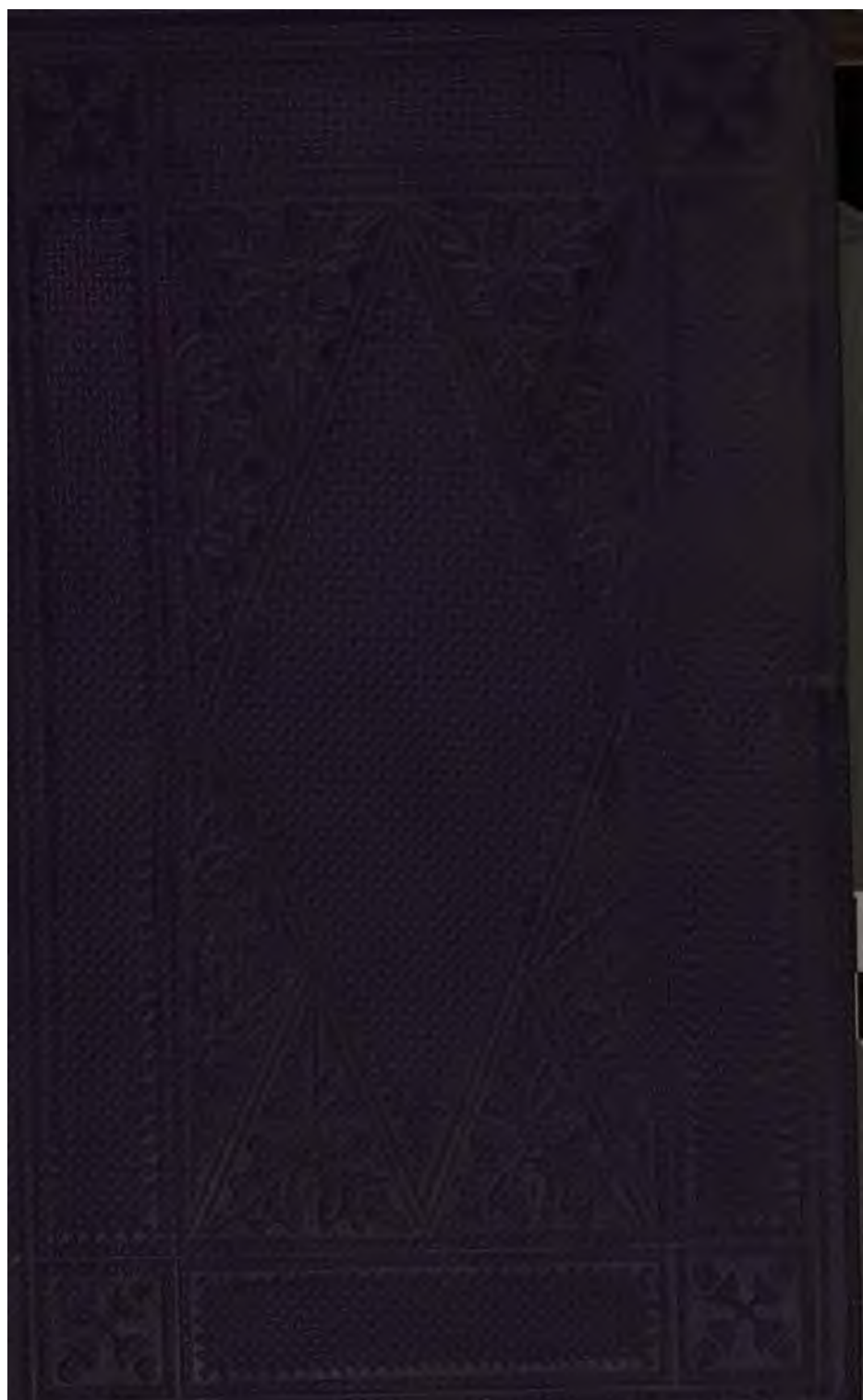
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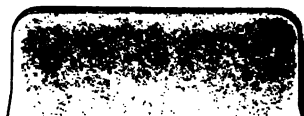
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HEART OR HEAD.

BY

PHILIP WHARTON,

ONE OF THE AUTHORS OF

“THE WITS AND BEAUX OF SOCIETY,” AND “THE
QUEENS OF SOCIETY.”

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HEART OR HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

I DON'T know a prettier church than that of Wilton even in England, where village churches are mostly pretty. The roof retained its original high pitch; the walls were crowded with thick ivy, and daubed here and there with yellow lichen; so that if Wilton Church had had no other advantage it would at least have been warm and attractive, not cold and repellant like your Anglo-Greek structures of stucco and stiffness, made complete with a pepper-box or extinguisher, so very consistent with the Corinthian portico it crowns; and I am of

opinion that a church gains by being pleasing to the eye.

However this may be, the interior of Wilton Church was solemn and impressive. The height of the roof and narrowness of the early English windows, together with the cross light thrown in from two rows of small double Norman windows in the clerestory, gave them a peculiarly impressive arrangement of light and shade. You seemed to have the gloom of earth mingling with the fair lines of heaven. Then again outside, the long pointed windows joined by interlacing arches the ball-fruit bead-work under the roof, the quaint gurgils of the Norman tower, and the immense length of nave and chancel—all gave it lightness, elegance and beauty. But the gem of the whole was decidedly the porch on the south side, with the magnificent Norman arch above its doorway, and those Norman pinnacles which surmounted it.

From this porch, one fine calm Sunday morning, issued a string of simple villagers. Simple,

yes, if ignorance of civilization and the grandeur of cities be simplicity ; simple, too, in retaining with honest conservatism the antique politeness and the antique rudeness with which their fathers greeted friends and repelled strangers ; but if any one believes that the guile of cities is unknown to fields and villages, he must be a poet.

What effect, indeed, had the drowsy common-places of their worthy rector, the doctrines selected from the most orthodox church authorities, and patched together in the most correct style of composition, on the sluggish minds of these people ? Giles, sober this morning, was even now saying that it was a “ bootiful discourse,” but by to-night, and long before, he will have forgotten every word of it, and be at his old place in the beer-shop, drinking his Sunday’s allowance (three glasses too much) and reeling home to beat his wife in his usual Sabbath fashion—for the church, the ale-house, and the fist are privileges of Sundays above all other days. Bill had listened, indeed, but what

had there been to reprove Bill's cruel and disgusting temper, which he was perpetually venting on Mrs. and the young Bills?

Mother Jones was clean and neat, and smiled respectfully issuing from the porch; but Mother Jones had not been warned how to live peacefully and uprightly, how to speak well of her neighbours, to bring up her children in the way they should go, and to leave off, "a-nagging and a-nagging" at that husband of hers, driving him to the pot-house. In short, the worthy rector has elegantly discoursed on abstruse doctrines, whereof the very words might be English to one or two members of the *three* families who called themselves gentry, but were absolute Chinese, Malayan, Timbuctooan or South African to the thirty-three other families, instead of boldly rebuking the well-known vices of his congregation, instead of pointing out the way by which a purer life and more happy union of neighbours could be procured. It was little wonder then that instead of coming from God's house refreshed and strengthened

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for the struggle, too many came out with a sigh of relief, as if an odious duty had been performed, and they might once more go back to ease, self-indulgence, and the intense delight of self-glorification.

Of course the "people" came first. There were a lot of rough lads in their Sunday best, with their yellow hair plastered down with water, or twisted into horn-like curls, who came out pushing and jolly, really glad (and not ashamed to show it) to have got over the tedium of sitting still. These at once burst into noisy mirth, poked one another in the ribs, jumped over the tombstones, and ran after one another round the church. Next came the wives, anxious to get home to prepare husband's dinner. Here one dragged a child by the hand, with a "Come along then, will thee," in no very tender tone; here another laughed aloud to her neighbour about something or other, and the third walked off as fast as she could.

Some of the people who came out made

their way rapidly on, some lingered, whether to see their neighbours or to pass the time. Among the latter I see a man who rather strikes me. He is evidently a labourer, if dress be any proof of it, but there is a certain intelligence about his face which does not at all belong to the peasant class of his native place. The face has been and is even now handsome, for the man is some five-and-thirty years old—the prime of life, say you, but then labour and bad food age rapidly, and in the rough whiskers and short-cropped hair there are already some tinges of grey. The features are prominent, somewhat refined and by no means coarse; the eyes are peculiarly large and black and there is a kind of twinkle of superior intelligence—almost of contempt—in them, which is very unusual among our peasantry. His figure, too, is tall and supple, and he carries himself uprightly and well. In fact, there is decidedly something of the “gentleman” about him, and you feel that of all the labourers who now loll round the porch, this

one could give you the most sensible reply to any inquiry.

This man places himself in the broad opening of the porch, leans his back against the side of it, and apparently waits for some one to come out. The young men in their Sunday best poke him in the side jocularly as they pass, and he is apparently on good terms with them, for he has a laughing answer for every one.

“Who’s thee a-wayeting for?”

“Not for you, so never you mind.”

At last, however, the man appears to be a very little agitated. He draws himself close up to the porch so as not to be in the way, takes his hand out of his pocket, and pulls a somewhat solemn face. Just as an elderly gentleman and his two daughters pass out of the porch, he raises his hand to his head respectfully, and stares with both eyes at one of the young ladies. The gentleman with his usual courtesy returns the salute with a bow and the three pass on. For a moment the labourer looks after them without moving, but

they have not gone many steps when he sees a little brown glove fall upon the path, and eagerly rushing forward, he picks it up, and going to her side holds it out to the younger daughter. He is a little too excited to get out any word, but you expect him to turn red and look confused, and instead thereof he puts on a kind of haughty air, does not even touch his hat, and holds the glove out with an attempt at indifference. The young lady accepts it with a very sweet smile, and for just a moment raises her eyes to see who it is whom she has to thank. There is nothing but the simplest indifference in her look as she does so, and yet to the labourer this ordinary glance has a meaning, and as he moves away his face flushes up a little. Then he thrusts his hands in his pockets, and whistling with well-feigned carelessness, strolls along in the crowd in such a manner as to keep the old gentleman and his daughters in view. At a short distance from the church-yard, however, his road and theirs diverge,

and after lingering a little at the corner, watching them, he turns up a steep path in the hill-side, which he climbs rapidly, muttering somewhat savagely to himself. A few of the lads on the other road shout after him as he comes in view, but he is too preoccupied to notice them, and continues to climb the hill nimbly.

These hills seem to lock in the little village on every side but one. They spring up steeply round the church, separated by wild gullies, in the bottom of which lie innumerable rough stones which have rolled down the hill-sides. Their brows are bare of trees, and covered only with short dry herbage, and masses of now yellowing gorse, sending out its delicious buttery smell. Here and there, indeed, are large plantations on the sides of some of the hills, and the low undulating country beyond is richly wooded. But the hills lose little by want of trees, for their forms are lovely, grouping together in complete harmony, and their brows broken here and there by jutting

rocks, are sunny and pleasant, commanding splendid views over the open country, and refreshed by little trickling streams that bubble out from under moss-covered stones. At the top is an enormous range of wild undulating high-land, with little to break the landscape but a stray stunted ash or two, a towering clump of furze, or a long stone wall broken down at every hundred yards. Cropping the short grass, and dotting it here and there for miles, are stout lazy sheep, panting under their heavy fleeces, or ba-ing to their sprightly offspring. A few lean black and white cattle and a few shaggy ponies complete the scene; and at the best, you must confess, it is rather a wild one.

Probably the man who strides across it thinks it a very cheerful ordinary region; at any rate, he is accustomed to an even wilder spot, and the valley to which he is making his way has scarcely a yard of verdure on it, and is composed of nothing but bare rocks on either side, with huge detached blocks that

have rolled down from them laying in the hollow, and a small black, gloomy tarn in the basin which the rocks form. By the side of this you can presently espy a little low cottage, built of rough stone, with a thatch of dried gorse, and surrounded by a little neatly-kept garden, where cabbages and potatoes are relieved by a few meagre dahlias and a tall, bushy fuchsia or two. It was evident that the soil of this wild stony gully was very unproductive, and that the garden had been cultivated with no slight labour and care. But as you pick your way over rocks and boulder-stones towards the dark tarn, you are surprised to find here and there a block of stone which has been carefully worked into a square, and then covered with straw or furze to protect it from the rain. It is certainly not a quarry here, but there must be some one who finds it worth while to work the stone, and that too even in an artistic manner, as these stray pieces, these mullions, and moulded curves, and half-finished pinnacles prove; and when we get to

the little black tarn and see the cottage better, we find projecting from the roof a lovely little bow-window of stone, evidently of recent date, finished with corbel-heads and capitals in the prettiest possible manner. It is certainly out of place on the low thatched roof, but it speaks of the taste of the inmates of the cottage, and interests one in the stonemason who inhabits it. Near the door are some of his tools; an iron pick and rollers with which to move the blocks; a chisel or two, a trowel, and a large round dusty mallet.

Through the low door of the cottage, the man, bending his head to avoid the cross-beam, entered without knocking. The cottage consisted of two rooms only, and had originally been rudely built, but had since been somewhat improved by the present inhabitant. The room was low and dark, and the rafters standing out clear from the ceiling and covered with a coating of dust, did not conduce to make it higher. But this fact was considered to be highly in its favour by the inmates, who, like all the

poor, attempt to make up by coziness what they cannot have in actual comfort; and certainly when the fire—which was almost always alight—was blown up into a cheerful flame, and threw a purple tint over the black rafters, the room was not unpleasant. Warmth and snugness had in fact been studied here after a rude fashion sufficient for the wants of the hardy inhabitants. The wide low window, small as it was, had yet its chintz curtains; a bit of rather antique carpet had been laid down over a part of the unsteady tiles of the floor, and best of all, there was a large high settle, the back of which, nearly reaching the ceiling, was turned towards the door so as to keep out all draughts, while its corner was close to the fire, and a cushion lay along its seat, which was broad enough to serve, on occasion, as a bed or sofa, as well as a chair. The remaining furniture of the glowing little room was of a kind which proclaimed the inmates to be not of the poorest class. There were large old-fashioned arm-chairs with bits of cushions

on their wooden seats; there was a goodly display of plates and dishes of a broad red and yellow pattern; a few well-scrubbed tin and copper vessels, reflecting the cheery fire-light, and even some clean modern prints in neat gilt frames upon the walls. But the least usual object in the room was a clump of vine leaves cut in stone, and very prettily arranged too, to serve as a termination to the hood of a pointed arch. This masterpiece, as the inmates evidently thought it, was hung against the wall in a conspicuous place, and the initials J. S. were somewhat prominently cut in one corner of it.

On the settle in question, and close in the corner, sat a feeble old man with a pillow at his back, and a long pewter ladle in his hand, the bowl of which was hidden in the black caldron which hung over the flames. The face of the old white-head was pleasant, though not cheerful. It was honest and open, but in the knitting of the shaggy brows, in the oily rheum which oozed out from the corners of the small

blood-shot eyes and in the lines about the quivering lips, you saw token at once of ill-health and anxiety. Perhaps, however, it may have been only the morbid grief of age, which wails over the past and cannot learn to see the fair future waiting to open on it in a happier world.

“ Well, dad,” said the younger man, drawing from his pocket a prayer-book and hymn-book, which he set in their place on the small book-shelf which hung on the wall. “ How are you getting on, eh ?”

But without waiting for an answer he sat down, drew from his pocket a small, meagre newspaper, folded it out, cut it with his finger, and began conning it over with more ease and rapidity than most men of his class find in reading.

A hollow voice, which seemed to come from under the settle, answered meanwhile, “ I’m a’ right, Jim, and the broth’s pretty nigh ready.”

In the accent of both father and son there was very little of the dialect of the country,

though that of the former was somewhat broad. The latter answered "all right" without moving, and the old man continued murmuring with his voice under the settle.

"It's a poor dinner an old man such as me can cook you, Jim, though I do my best, for I'm not worth much more than to keep house like an old 'oman, now-a-days. It's little good a-thinking an' a-pining over my old mis-sus, as is gone this five year; she were a woman, she were, Jim, the cleverest and the best as ever walked in shoe-leather. Well, it's o' no use fretting about her, nor—nor," and the old man moved his head to and fro sadly, "nor of she as isn't gone, though it's better if she were—"

Jim raised his head suddenly and glared fiercely towards the old man.

"And was ruined," he almost growled, "by the gentry, as they call themselves—our superiors indeed!"

He clenched his fist and laid it on the table, as with set lips and moving head, he turned his

eyes on the paper again, scarcely reading it though, as he thought of his sister.

"Well, well," continued the old man to himself, "it's no use a-moaning and a-groaning after what can't be helped, it's better to look out how one can mend it, and that's why I say to you, Jim, at your age, you ought to be takin' a wife to come and keep house for yourself and your old father."

The young man appeared to be again absorbed in his paper. At any rate this appeal of his father had been too often repeated to affect him at all.

The old one, however, winked his eyes and looked at him for a reply, till suddenly the broth boiling over called his attention to the neglected ladle.

"Do just lay a bit o' cloth, Jim," he murmured, at this refractory conduct of the caldron, "here's the broth's ready for eating."

Jim rose ill-temperedly enough, and opening a closet, took out a coarse but clean cloth, which looked somewhat like a large towel, laid

the table hastily and carelessly, and sat down again at it to go on with his newspaper. The old man said nothing, but, shuffling across the room, fetched a couple of earthenware bowls or basins, which he filled one after another with broth from the caldron, and any one who looked over his shoulder might have seen that he selected the most tempting pieces of beef to place in the bowl which he set before his son.

The old man eat slowly but largely; the younger one only played with his food while he read his newspaper. This was not sociable, and when the father had done his basin of soup, and discussed his lump of meat, he looked eagerly at his son for a little conversation. At last he said,

“What be you a-readin’, Jim?”

“The ‘People,’” replied the son surlily.

“Ah, ah! always at the same. And what be this you’re at now? Lord a’ mercy on my poor old eyes. Time was I could read as well as you, though your mother, she used to say,

says she: 'the schoolmistress allays reads better than the parish-clerk, and Mary Stephens reads better than Tom.' Poor Mary, if she was here now, she'd be a-readin' the news to me, I'm thinking."

"It ain't news," says the other, pettishly, to excuse himself for the imputed neglect, "it's O'Connor's speech, that he made at Leeds on Tuesday, denouncing the tyranny of of the airistocracy."

Whatever the old man's reply might have been, it was rendered inaudible by a loud knocking at the door.

"Come in," shouted Jim savagely, while the old man got up and toddled with some difficulty towards the entrance, just as a handsome head with a profusion of hair under a respectable hat was poked in, and its owner inquired:

"Can you oblige me by telling me the way to the Wynch?"

At this Jim started up, for the Wynch was a house which had a peculiar interest to his morbid mind, strange deserted place that it

was, and moreover it had been the first place where he, as a boy, had learned the art of building under his father's guidance. Then too his hatred of the gentry, or as he called them the "airistocracy" was mingled with a deep admiration for them, for the feeling arose as much from envy as from anything else.

"The Wynch?" quoth he, coming to the door, "I can show you the way." He took care not to put in a "Sir."

"Ah! suppose you do, then," said the stranger. "But wait, you're at dinner; I won't take you away."

"I've done, as much as I want to eat," said he, grabbing his hat.

"And that's never much, Sir," muttered the old man.

At the garden gate stood another gentleman with his forehead knit, and his eyes staring vacantly towards the ground. The fact was that Cunliffe and Preston had been engaged just before in argument, about which the latter was still thinking; when Cunliffe and Jim

joined him, he seemed to take no notice of either, but walked on quietly by their side without saying a word. Meanwhile, Jim became loquacious with a certain amount of pertness which he himself mistook for independence.

"I suppose I do know the Wynch," said he, "for it was restored most by my father, and it was there I learnt to put mortar on brick. You see we *common* people are rather proud than ashamed of our business."

He was much disappointed to see no sign of shame or annoyance on the face of the gentleman at this speech, and surprised when he replied :

"Ah ! that is just what we were discussing ;— whether labour was properly appreciated as an honor. Preston, you see I was right. Here is a builder who glories in the house he built."

"Who is so ashamed of his position, that he calls his class 'common people,' and makes a kind of excuse for it," said the other, with a sneer, as he walked on.

Jim was decidedly taken back at this speech, but recovered himself with wonder nerve.

"Aye," quoth he, "I call 'em common, because that's what the aristocracy calls us in their pride."

"The aristocracy? there is no aristocracy," answered Preston.

Jim opened his eyes to the widest, and gave vent to a long low whistle. Preston went on without raising his eyes.

"Whether you understand the word in its Utopian sense to mean the government of the best, according to its definition, or take it in the vulgar acceptation of a dominant class, you cannot prove that in this country and this century an aristocracy exists. Heaven knows we are not governed by the best either in mind or morals, nor is the actual governing body a separate class, but a mixture and selection of all classes. If you object to this, that you mean a class which is dominant in virtue of its influence, whether invested with governing powers or not, I reply that no such class exists,

except in the imaginations of men who do not appreciate the grandeur of their own individual worth. Labour is the test of position. The highest kind labour is that of the mind alone. To work with money comes next; to work with the body is the lowest. But the labourers of the highest class have no dominion over the rest in virtue of their class. The only influence they possess is that of their minds, and varies according to their intellectual capacity. Then too as labour is sold and contracted for in the present day, every labourer whether with mind, money or manhood is independant of any class. If there were a serfdom or feudal system in this country, you would have a right talk of a dominant class; but when every man is free to sell his labour where he lists, he is under the dominion of no class whatever."

Jim did not understand this argument, and so could not reply to it, but Cunliffe put in :

"Then the employed is at the mercy of the employer."

"True, but then too the employer is at the

mercy of the employed. If there is a demand there must be a supply. It is the labourer who gives that supply and can withhold it, if he choose. You might as well tell me that the corn-merchant is the master of the farmer, as the manufacturer is king of the hands he employs. On the contrary, they are his masters—I might almost say his benefactors, for while he only enables them to live, they enable him to do more, to grow rich and thrive,”

“Ay, ay,” cried Jim eagerly, “now you speak sense. The labourer confers a favour on the employer.”

“Then why does the labourer talk of tyranny, and the power of an aristocracy.”

“I’ll tell you, then,” said Jim, pertly, “because it ain’t the manufacturer we complain of; it’s the gentry as are born with silver-spoons in their mouths, and have no connexion whatever with the labourer, and therefore look down upon him.”

“But the gentry are only another class of employers, they need your labour and pay for

it and can't get on with it: This very house you speak of was built, I suppose, for one of these same silver-spoons you complain of. He wanted a house, a house he must have. If masons refused to work for him, he was at their mercy; and that refusal of theirs would have been worse tyranny than any "looking-down" that your lively imagination conjures up. And as for tyranny, there have been times when the employed have exercised it over the employers in the cruellest and most selfish manner, and have united for the sole purpose of forcing them to ruinous conditions. You never heard of employers combining to get labour cheaper, but you hear every day of the employed uniting to force their employers to pay higher wages."

"That don't prove there's no aristocracy," said Jim irritably, "there must be an aristocracy. It's an acknowledged fact; look through the paper and you will find it mentioned in every column."

"What is that paper?" asked Preston quietly.

"The best in the country—the 'People.'"

"Perhaps you do not know that the writers of papers of this kind are either fools or knaves."

"What's that you say?" asked Jim, fiercely turning upon the speaker. "Say that again, young man."

Cunliffe interfered.

"Look, look, here we are. Is that the Wynch?"

"That is the Wynch," answered Jim sulkily, and dropping his fist as he reflected that there were two to one against him. Moreover however much offended, Jim was interested in the conversation of men of a class which he rarely could associate with, and though perhaps he would have preferred invective and prejudice to calm argument, there was much novelty to him in this talk; and these gentlemen treated him with most unusual equality, which, of course, he set down to their acknowledgment of his intellectual superiority.

They were now entering a green valley far away among the hills, wild, gloomy and silent,

yet darkened by some splendid trees, among which the roof of the house was seen. A tiny stream trickled rather than flowed by their path, yet small as it was, it sufficed to nourish the grass and make a contrast between this shady glade and the rough barren hills around it. In another moment they got a full view of the house.

It was perfectly square, and built of red brick with stone copings, and a high slate roof crowned with a rickety belfry and tumble-down vane that had been gilt some fifty years before, but was now brown. On the side near to them was a range of stables and out-houses, the redder brick-work of which proved it to have been a later addition.

“That was my father’s building,” said Jim, pointing to these later buildings. “You’ll admit it’s well built, and, you see, just in the same fashion as the house itself. Then on the other side, where you can’t see it from here, there’s an arch of the same build, all the finest red brick with the best stone that could be got out of the

hill—and a good white stone it is, too, though it's too soft to last."

"And did your father cut those bunches of fruit over the windows?" asked Cunliffe.

"I warrant he did, and restored all the stone-work of the windows all over the house. There was a lot of money spent on all these improvements, and just see what a place it is now—scarcely a pane of glass left whole in it, and not a room it fit for a pig to live in."

Preston gave Cunliffe a smile.

"Just the place for my purpose," he said in a low tone. Then he added to Jim: "How did the house come to fall in such ruin?"

"All along of the lawyers" answered Jim. "Chancery, I think it was; and when old Wurniss died, they managed to clutch hold of his money and kept the heir out of it for twelve years, while they squandered his money in expenses. He came down here about fifteen years ago, and my father and I went over the house with him and estimated what it would cost to get all square again. It would have

taken something like a hundred and fifty pound, let alone furnishing, and I fancy he wasn't going to bag out that or anything like it. He's never been here since, at any rate, and the land was sold soon after. They couldn't get anything for the house, and so the bats and rats have got it all to themselves you see."

They had now reached the house, and walked round it to examine its desolation. At the back by which they had approached was a small garden long since given up to weeds, and surrounded by a high jealous wall. The front, however, showed signs of former taste, for here as the hill sloped down, a garden had been raised upon a platform surrounded by massive stone-work, and crowned by an elegant balcony of white stone.

"My father's work, too," said Jim.

Upon this terrace you entered only from the windows in the front, and though it was not large, it was just the place to sit out in when the evenings were warm, and watch the sun

set over the plain, of which there was here a magnificent view.

The house was certainly in a very miserable condition. It was one of three storeys, with a variety of pigeon-hole windows in the lofty roof. On each storey were four windows in row, and those upon the terrace were of full length. Yet there was not one whole pane of glass in all these windows, and in some the strips of now brown blinds which had once been white flapped through the empty frames. The weathercock at the top creaked with a most dismal noise in the wind, which threatened every now and then to bring down the whole of the belfry.

"In high winds" said Jim, "that bell gets a swinging of itself, and you can hear it at our cottage quite plain."

Cunliffe amused himself by peeping in at the grim windows, wherever he could reach to them, or poking up the shreds of blinds with his stick. He shook his head after each examination.

"You can never live here, Preston," said he.

"Can't I?" he replied drawing himself up with something of pride. "I should be little fitted for my work, if this first difficulty baffled me."

Jim listened with amazement.

"Live *here*," quoth he. "Well, I warrant the ghosts would soon drive you out, if the vermin didn't."

"The first are dead already, and I'll kill the second."

"Well, my father and I can put it in decent repair for you in a month or six weeks," said Jim, snatching at the idea.

"Thank you; a glazier to fill up windows of one or two rooms, and an upholsterer to put me a bed, a table and a couple of chairs in it, will do all my work."

"Well, much may you like it" said Jim with a sneer, "I'd rather be in my little cottage any day."

"And so would I, but that would not suit my plans. Come, Cunliffe, we'll have a look round the place, and then go down to the inn for our traps and the key—"

"You never mean to sleep here to-night?" ejaculated Cunliffe.

"Certainly I do, I must take the bull by the horns."

Cunliffe shuddered. The determination of his friend awed him, and he began to think that he had been rash in pledging himself to a scheme which involved such a trial of self. They went round the out-houses in silence, Jim and Cunliffe both wondering at the strange resolution of the other, who on his part was deep in thought.

Preston drew a shilling from his pocket and held it out to Jim without a word. Jim did not take it at once. It was a temptation, for he and his father were hard up, but he thought of independence, and that kind of thing; and hesitated. Preston still held out

the shilling and said nothing. Suddenly he put it into his pocket again.

“As it is Sunday” said he, quietly, “I will not tempt you to make money by even so slight a work. You shall have the satisfaction of conferring a favour on the aristocracy, my independant friend.”

“Nonsense,” cried Cunliffe, “he must be a better philosopher than he seems to be, to give us his time for nothing.”

And so saying he put a shilling into Jim’s hand, and having asked the nearest way to the village, turned to his friend; Jim walked away wondering whether these two men came from the moon or not, but glad of the shilling for all that.

CHAPTER II.

THE two men walked down to the village, they passed the church just as the people were going in for afternoon service.

"Are you hungry, Cunliffe?" asked Preston.

"Ravenous."

"Then let us go into church. This is the principle which Hibberd gave us for the formation of character, never be in a hurry to satisfy a desire. I dare say the world will tell us that we war against nature; it may be, what do I care for nature, if I can form a better

guide for myself? moreover, there is this about most desires, that they are but short lived. The old proverb, 'resist the devil and he will flee from you,' only says the same thing in other words. I know, that whoever sows, it is we who rear the plant and reap the grain. If we take no care of the young shoot it soon withers; in other words you won't be hungry an hour hence if you have something else to think about."

Cunliffe hesitated.

"You are not going to show yourself weak, Cunliffe," quoth Preston. "Moreover, there is a deal of unknown wisdom hidden in the land, maybe we shall suck honey here. The parson must think and must have laboured for a few hours over his sermon. Can we pass by and not profit by his mind?"

"Oh! you will hear nothing worth a corner of your memory."

"Then let us go at least to worship. Mind you, Cunliffe, men cannot worship too much,

and the divinity we seek to cultivate within us, must gather fresh light by soaring near to the Divinity we ought to copy. Cunliffe, does it raise in you any feeling of thankfulness to see these people wending their way to God's house? Let it be habit, custom, fashion, what you will, that brings them here. Grant it is something for our joy, that it is even a habit to worship. We might have been pitched in a land where habit is to kill and eat, and where worship is only the result of weakness."

Preston thrust his arm into his friend's and looked affectionately into his face.

"I wonder," quoth he, "if the good spirit that is in you and me will be strong enough to conquer this miserable world."

"I go there to try," said Cunliffe pointing to the church, "but you only fly temptation."

"We will talk of that to-night."

And so they entered the porch of God's house. Now I have said nothing about the appearance of these two men, but in fact it is

not to be overlooked, because while from their conversation we may have gathered that they are philosophers in their way, we shall only tell from their outward mien that they were men of the world. I am not now going to discourse on the value of beauty, all gifts are good if we use them well, but the gift of physical beauty is one to be appreciated. Now these two men were really handsome, though after an ordinary model, Cunliffe at least might have been known at once for what he recently was—an officer in her Majesty's army. He was well dressed, tall, with high aquiline features and a profusion of light whisker and moustache, and curly reddish hair. In short just such a man to look at as you see every week in Leech's sketches in *Punch*, though with a less sheepish expression. Preston was somewhat of the same stamp; he too had been in the army, but I may here mention that they had both sold out. He had a remarkably handsome face, a pale clear skin,

straight, delicate features, eyes that flashed when he spoke and seemed to sleep when he was silent, and a large black beard. The marvel was how two army-men came to be such philosophers, because soldiers are not given to thinking. But then these two men might have been anything by trade, chimney-sweepers or costermongers, it really matters little what you are, when you are a man and not a fool. They were both about the same age—thirty, and had seen and “done” the world in almost every phase. Being men and not fools, their experience had been a lesson not a guile to them, and instead of being worldly from being in the world, they had risen above it and were independent of it. Men like these are uncommon, yet if you think these two were much better than human with every human weakness, you are mistaken.

Now, when poor little Evelyn saw these strangers come into church her heart fluttered, and she could not keep herself from staring at

them. As for Margaret, her elder sister, she paid them little attention; but Margaret could take in at one glance what Evelyn required a whole study to understand, and so, when she had well scanned them once, she never turned her eyes to them again. I believe Evelyn never thought her prayers that afternoon. Of course she said them, but there is somewhat of a gulf between saying and thinking. She was wondering in her mind who these strangers could be, because at Wilton they never saw strangers, except indeed the one or two London men who came down to stay with the Pilgrims, and with whom the Mordaunts rarely, if ever, became acquainted.

I do think Margaret and Evelyn Mordaunt were two of the pleasantest girls to look at that were ever seen. They were very much alike, and yet completely different. They had both the same monstrous eyes, but Margaret's were cold and calm, Evelyn's vivid. These same eyes were blue, of the deepest blue, and rolled

in masses of blue, which ought to have been white. Both these girls were consumptive more or less, (a very bad thing even in heroines) and they had all the beauty of incipient consumption. When I say "consumptive" I mean what mammas calls "delicate."

Margaret had dark hair and Evelyn brown, with just a sun-tint of gilt in it. Both had the same short faces, the same small quiet mouths, the same small noses, the same peculiar hollow in the lower part of the face. But though in feature neither was beautiful, both had expressions which might have damned St. Anthony or any other saint. Yet there was this difference; Margaret appeared to have experience of the world, and Evelyn none; Margaret was calm, composed and even authoritative, Evelyn was soft, gentle, yielding, and somehow very interesting. When you looked at Evelyn, you said "it is an Alpine lake, how deep, how unfathomable." When you knew

Evelyn you might perhaps say "it is a shallow pond;" but then when did you know Evelyn? As she said herself, no one ever understood her, shallow as she was.

The Mordaunts sat in a pew of the size of a small room, and on the opposite side of the chancel was its ditto, belonging to the Pilgrims, the family of the place; for the Mordaunts, if of older date in the parish, were too poor to take a prominent place in the county. In the pew of next size sat a slim man of fifty, whom at a glance you knew to be an old bachelor, and in his way an old beau. All down the nave the pews varied in size and the height of their walls, according to the position of their occupants, for position is by no means forgotten even in God's house. At the west end were a few low, hard, humble free-seats, occupied mainly by the ancients; old, bent women in huge black poke bonnets, old, bent men in grey stockings and shorts. It was to these free seats that the two strangers turned naturally and there took their places.

But they were not allowed to stop there. Mr. Wytham, the old bachelor, felt quite shocked to see two such distinguished men sitting among the poor; and as for Colonel Mordaunt he was so much grieved at their position, that simultaneously with Mr. Wytham he made a sign to the clerk to come over to him. That official went to the Colonel first, as in duty bound.

"There is room in our pew for those gentlemen," whispered the Colonel. The clerk bowed and proceeded to Mr. Wytham.

"Pray ask those gentlemen into my pew, unless," he added impressively, "the Colonel wishes to have them in his."

The clerk bowed again and proceeded to the strangers. To the amazement of both inviters, the strangers protested they could say their prayers very well where they were, and could not be induced to accept the invitations. Mr. Wytham and Colonel Mordaunt both took it rather ill that their invitations were not res-

ponded to, and Evelyn, who inherited the Colonel's ideas to a certain extent, puzzled herself with the question why they preferred the free seats, and arrived at characteristic solutions thereof about the time that the service began.

The sermon was preached by the Curate, Mr. Moore, a pale-faced young man from Cambridge, who prided himself on his preaching; and when asked on one occasion why so few poor people came to church in the morning, replied with sweet humility: "You see, they can't always be sure of me." In truth, however, Mr. Moore's sermons were popular among the lower orders, for both their matter and manner.

Mr. Moore had a powerful voice, and a habit of mouthing and whining and melting to tears which the uneducated rejoiced in; for they could not reason, and so revelled in emotion. Lastly Mr. Moore had a plentiful vocabulary of what, without irreverence, may be termed religious cant, metaphorical phrases, conventional smiles, which meant little or nothing in themselves,

but were very "effective" altogether, and when brought out with the force in which he delighted, were pronounced "very fine" by the emotional part of the congregation. Add to which that Mr. Moore had a strong provincial accent and talked of the "kerrr-nels of the hearr-r-t" of "glow-ry in the skee-y" "see-rious ree-flection," and so forth, and you will understand how delightful a preacher he must have been.

When all was over, Mr. Wytham balanced up to the Colonel, who had got a daughter on each arm and walked erect between them, and raising his hat with a studied grace, walked on by Margaret's side. Mr. Wytham is thin almost to a fault in figure, and wears a black frock coat buttoned up, a high collar and black satin cravat, and a hat of which the brim is slightly curled. He has a plain grey face, grey hair, grey whiskers, and a twinkle in his small grey eyes, and a head which does not seem quite steady on its neck.

"Strangers in church, Miss Margaret," he says with a smile, "quite an event for Wilton. Let me see, we have not had any since—since—"

"Since the Pilgrims left," says Evelyn in a scarcely audible voice, blushing at her own audacity in speaking. It is a peculiarity of Evelyn's character that she never forgets a date.

"Rather gentlemanlike men," says the Colonel, looking forward at the two strangers who are on far a-head.

"Remarkably so," echoes Mr. Wytham, "and handsome too, Miss Margaret—eh?"

"I scarcely saw them," says Margaret, carelessly, "you had better ask Evelyn what she thought of them. She was looking down the nave at somebody or other the whole of the service."

Evelyn blushes outright at this accusation, gets suddenly excited and exclaims. "Meg, dear, how can you say so? Did I, papa? I'm sure I scarcely looked at them."

"No harm if you had; but do you know who they are, Wytham?"

"Not I. Probably they have walked over from Launceston, and dropped in to church haphazard."

"They had no prayer-books, I know," Evelyn ventures to put in.

"Ah! I thought Miss Evelyn had scarcely noticed them," cries Mr. Wytham.

"Bless your soul, Wytham, do you think any girl at seventeen would keep her eyes on her prayer-book, when there were a couple of young dandies within seventy yards of her?"

"I am sure," says Margaret, "one would imagine we had none of us seen a gentleman of any kind for months, from the interest we seem to take in them; do tell me how your horse is, Mr. Wytham, after its accident?"

The inquiry suggested something to the Colonel, and the conversation took different turns with all except Evelyn, who walked on in silence, asking herself questions concerning

the strangers and wondering who they could be and whether she should ever see them again.

Now it was a custom established for the last two years at least, that whenever Mr. Wytham was not away—for he was rich and resorted much to London, though he protested that he had (and perhaps really had) a great affection for quiet little Wilton—he should dine with Mordaunts on Sunday at their usual five o'clock dinner. The Colonel enjoyed the gossip and liveliness of the old bachelor, and Mr. Wytham was glad to get some amusement for the long dull Sunday. The whole party therefore proceeded together to Marfield, which was about a mile from Wilton.

Nothing could have been more romantic than this old house, which had belonged to the Mordaunts since the days of Queen Bess, and had once been surrounded by a goodly domain, which one after another of the family had diminished by extravagance or speculation, the Colonel himself closing the list by selling

the last few acres to pay the debts of a son, who began life at a university and was now feeding sheep in Australia—his only son, but one whose name he never so much as mentioned now.

The situation of the house was in itself curious, and could only be accounted for by the fact that long before the Mordaunts came into possession of it, it had been a religious establishment of some kind. What else could have induced its builder, at an age when close vicinity was necessary for safety, to have pitched his tent in a lonely basin of the hills, a mile from the nearest village, five miles from a town of any importance, and in a position to which access was not easy.

As you came down the hilly road from Wilton, you looked upon a rich green plain about half a mile in length and a little less across. All round this rose high hills, with deep rocky gullies between them, and covered sometimes with thick woods, sometimes with short heather.

Down one of these gullies came a small stream which wound round one side of the plain, and after forming a considerable lake, forced its way out by a narrow valley which led towards Launceston. By the side of this lake grew a mass of splendid trees, oak, elm, and cedar, and hidden among these—from the Wilton road at least—was Marfield House.

Built some time in the reign of Henry VIII or his successor, it was substantial but low, picturesque but gloomy, and large as it appeared to be outside, there were scarce half a dozen good rooms within it. What there were, however, were enormous, being rather galleries than rooms. But it is the home of our heroine and therefore deserves closer description.

So then as you descend the hilly road from Wilton, you pass through various gates that warn you it is no highway, and by many farm-buildings on a large scale, all of which are of the same date as the house. Not all, however

for on a slight elevation to your left is a building used indeed as a barn, but which a practiced eye can detect at once as a chapel. This is the last remnant of the old conventual establishment and decides its original date. For here in the belfry is the deep double window beloved of the Normans, and here on the south side an entrance over which is a round arch ornamented with the well-known lozenge, ball, and bead mouldings. Grey and sturdy the little Norman chapel stands there long after the house it belonged to has crumbled away ; stands where it has stood for may be seven hundreds of years, and neglected though it be, still with its thick well-built walls defies the hand of time which is already leaving its mark upon the house below. Quaint little relic, what stories could you tell of savage days, of a religion of fear and a law of the sword ? What of knights and dames in the heart of England speaking a foreign tongue, and serfs and herds hating their fine French masters only more bit-

terly than their descendants hate their fine French allies ! Well, I must not linger over the Norman chapel.

The house is so hidden by trees on this side, that you see nothing of it but its roofs till you are within the grounds ; and just as she passed through the gate, Evelyn who carried no less than three good size books, a Bible, prayer-book and hymn-book, broke from her father and hurried forward towards the house to put her books away that she might, before dinner, go and see the dogs, this visit being the regular sequence to afternoon church.


She hurries then along a broad road darkened with numerous cedars on either side, under which is soft brown turf, and beyond which you catch a glimpse of the lake. Among these cedars are mysterious walks which go anywhere and nowhere, as Mr. Wytham and Margaret probably know when soon after they saunter along them, while the Colonel goes in to get a glance at the newspaper before dinner.

Where the cedars end, a large flat lawn with scarcely any inclination towards the water begins, and by the side of this the carriage roads leads up to the door of the house. The lawn is unbroken by any beds and more resembles a bowling-green, the turf being old, mossy and of a brownish green. Beyond the lawn more trees, and beyond those again we catch a glimpse of red geraniums and gay china asters. But when we turn and get a full view of the house, we are startled by its immense size. It has three sides ; one might almost say, three fronts, and each side is crowned with no less than six gables, behind which, with that peculiarly tasteful arrangement the builders of old so well understood, stand large blocks of tall chimneys of different heights and patterns, some twisted, some ribbed, and some covered with lozenge-mouldings. At the back of the house which we do not see from this side at all, are these numberless out-houses and offices, which were indispensable in days when a large house-

holder was his own baker, brewer and even butcher.

The front which faces the lawn and lake is of course the best finished. Here, however, the broad hooded windows have been replaced by long ones with cross mullions, probably in the time of Charles II. Here too the jasmine grows most luxuriantly, and almost conceals the low porch by which you enter. There are roses, red and white—the latter in full bloom, ivy, Virginian creepers and so on, all covering this face of the house, while the others have to be content with ivy alone, woody and thick-stemmed, for its age is very great.

Evelyn hurried in under the porch up a flight of very dark oaken stairs—dark not only in the colour of the wood, well-polished though it was, but also in the absence of daylight. Indeed the whole house was dark, owing partly to the build thereof, and partly to the cedars which hem it in. She rushes up the stairs beginning to hum a little tune, but checks her-



self when she remembers it is Sunday ; for Evelyn has been taught to consider almost everything wrong on that day, and she has a most scrupulous conscience. She passes along a long, broad ghostly corridor, looking out on the back of the house, and merging at either end into other long ghostly corridors, while here and there ghostly little passages and ghostly little staircases, all of which seem to be somewhat superfluous—the passages leading to nowhere particular, and the staircases up being counterbalanced by staircases down again at short distances—run out of the corridor where you least expect them. At last, darting into a small black passage up three stairs and then down two, she enters a dark pannelled room with a huge four-post bed in it, and without stopping there passes into an inner chamber, which being small and having a large window offers the agreeable variety of light. The room has some quaint things about it, which shall be described hereafter. For

the present, Evelyn carefully stows her three books into their habitual place on a little book-shelf, carefully puts her folded gloves into a drawer, takes a comb from her pocket, and for the tenth time that day—as usual—combs the front of her hair, without looking into a glass; for Evelyn is not vain, only neat—and then darts merrily back again down the corridors and staircases into the garden.

She seems to have taken a great deal of trouble for very little result, but Evelyn always does that, and she is as regular and neat in every detail as an old maid, and that too at seventeen.

She passes quickly and cheerfully to the side of the house opposite to the one near the carriage-road. This side is the most cheerful of all, and is that upon which the window of her boudoir looks out. There are no dark cedars here, but a high garden with a kind of terrace close to the house, and a view of the hills behind. She has to mount a flight of stone-

steps to this garden, which is laid out in the old-fashioned style with beds and walks, and mingles somewhat the flower-garden and kitchen-garden. Here the beds are surrounded with neat borders of box, with standard-roses and dwarf apple-trees. They are full of gay flowers, and subdivided by numberless neat walks, broad and narrow. There is a small basin for a fountain in the middle, but no fountain has played these many a long year. Beyond this is the regular kitchen-garden, and beyond that a wall over which you look down upon the little stream just where it begins to widen into the lake.

She stops a moment on the terrace, goes down on one knee, and fumbling among a profusion of dark leaves looks for a violet or two. At the other end of the terrace walk in a door, through which she passes to a large stable-yard, and is no sooner inside than three black Newfoundland dogs rush playfully upon her and cater for her favour.

“Dear old Muff; down Tippet, you rude creature; Boa, Boa, you old love, take that.”

She draws from her pocket a large piece of bread which she has kept there since lunch, and throws bits of it out into the yard. The fact is, that so regular and monotonous is the life at Marfield, that “seeing the dogs” is as much a Sunday duty with Evelyn as going to church. She would not miss it for anything, and when we know her better we shall understand why seeing the dogs is as great an amusement to her this day, as it was three or four hundred days before. It is really a pretty sight to see her play with the great clumsy beasts. They love Evelyn better than any other inmate of the house, and she understands them better, and better enjoys their society than that of any one else. Now she gives them her orders, and all three squat on their haunches facing her at a respectable distance. Then she divides her bread, and calling each of the brothers by his quaint name, throws to each a piece which he catches adroitly in his huge mouth.

“Ah! Tipsums, you missed that time—naughty Tips.”

Then round again, and then she claps her hands merrily and all three jump up at once and bound towards her, then picking up her dress, she gives them a chase round the yard, laughing and talking all the time, till she is out of breath, while the unwieldy creatures bound up to her hands, and well understanding the game pretend to snap at them, for with the canine (sometimes with the human) race, enmity in sport is love in earnest. Then ordering them to lie down, which they immediately do, she arranges her dress, and having gone to each and petted him with a “good bye, Muff,” “good bye, Tippet,” and so on, she leaves the yard and returns to the house.

Every Sunday after the second service will Evelyn repeat this little pantomime, until something more interesting turns up, and when will that be? Ah! Evelyn, you have no idea how

near that something is, and Muff, Boa and Tippet have no idea whatever—how should they have ideas—how soon they are to be forgotten on Sunday afternoons.

The dinner went off as usual, very comfortably. The Sunday dinner never varied at Marfield. There was the regular roast beef at one end and the regular pair of fowls at the other. Margaret and Evelyn appeared as usual in evening dresses. As usual too, Mr. Wytham and the Colonel did the most talking, Margaret joining in however with clever and somewhat satirical remarks from time to time, much to Wytham's delight. He had his usual weekly gossip collected from the whole neighbourhood, and when this was exhausted, the Colonel talked of his pigs and poultry; his improvements which never were made and never would be made, because he could never afford them; his interest in the board of guardians and the cases of crime or poverty—for the Colonel was a charitable man—in the neighbourhood. Then politics had their

turn and Wytham had a little private intelligence on these matters from his club in town for the especial edification of "Miss Margaret."

But whatever the theme, Evelyn never said a word. She had never been known to say more than two or three at a Sunday dinner, and long as they had known the bachelor, she always looked rather frightened at him. It was only when a name, or a date, or small peculiar circumstance was sought to be recalled that Evelyn volunteered assistance. Her father said to Wytham over his port now and then. "Evelyn is not clever, certainly not, but she has a good memory."

The two or three words however were this time of a different cast. "By the way, Miss Margaret," said the old bachelor, during a lull in the conversation, "your favourite haunted house, is, I hear, to be really haunted."

"My favourite. It is Eve who is always going there."

Evelyn blushed as a matter of course.

"I suppose you mean the Wynch," she said in a low timid voice.

"Well then, Miss Evelyn, you will be interested to know that a tenant has at last been found for the Wynch."

"Nonsense," cried the Colonel. "That ricketty old shell will scarcely hold a rat."

"It is a fact, I assure you; I have it from Adams, who is agent to what's his name—?"

Nobody knew the name except Evelyn, who suggested "Mr. Wurniss."

"Ah, just—Wurniss. I was sure Lyn would know it," said the Colonel, pouring out another glass of sherry

"Mr. Wurniss has let it for—what do you think? The cheapest thing I ever heard of—positively for £10 a year."

"Well, I would not live there, if you paid me seventy," said Margaret, "unless you undertook to supply me with all the comic singers, clowns, wits, and clever talkers in England all the year round, to keep my spirits up."

"Does Miss Margaret think clever talkers can drive away ghosts?"

"They often conjure them up, I admit," said Margaret.

Just then Evelyn was heard to murmur, "what a pity!"

"What is Miss Evelyn? that the ghosts will be driven away? Of course it is. A great pity, a great shame to dislodge such old, unmolested respectable inhabitants."

But Evelyn had other ideas.

"Oh! Meg, dear," she exclaimed, opening her large eyes with sudden excitement, "don't you think it's those strangers we saw in church who have come to take the Wynch, Meg, dear!" A most impolite roar of laughter from the Colonel and Margaret followed this suggestion. But Evelyn was accustomed to be laughed at, and though she coloured a little, she was not at all confused.

"My dear Eve, what can you be thinking of?" said Margaret.

"Just like Lyn," cried her father, "always jumping at queer conclusions. What on earth made you think of that, Lyn?"

"I don't know—only I shouldn't at all wonder."

"Come, Miss Evelyn," said Wytham, "I'll take your part. Don't let them laugh at you. It is a very sensible idea, and one which occurred to myself when I heard of the rent. I think it not unlikely, Colonel, that Pilgrim will take to letting his shooting this year—you know he does'nt care for it, and if so, some one may have taken the Wynch at these low terms on the understanding that he will repair it."

"But it would take £200 or £300 to make it habitable."

"Scarcely so much; I fancy Wurniss only wants to prevent it falling into ruins until he can afford to repair it thoroughly, and a man who came only for shooting would be content to do up two or three rooms, lay out some fifty

pounds or so, and after all have a large house at a small rent. The stables you see are very good, as Williams used to keep his horses there, if you remember ; and a couple of men who were out all day might find it habitable. Why, bless your soul, Miss Margaret, my shooting-box at Strathgarry was a hovel to the Wynch."

The question was discussed at length, till it seemed not only possible but probable that Evelyn's suggestion might be correct, and every body admitted that they liked the appearance of the strangers and might find them very agreeable neighbours.

At length the girls left the dining room, and as the evening was delightfully warm the Colonel and Mr. Wytham brought their glasses to the window, and the latter cheering over his wine began to bring out some of those favourite stories which were thought a shade too broad for the young ladies, but which made the Colonel so merry.

Margaret and Evelyn ran to the dressing-room, a long low gallery with four windows looking upon the lawn and two upon the terrace. This room was still pannelled with very dark polished oak, relieved by many quaint portraits of Mordaunts—Sir Geoffery in armour; Sir William painted by Dobson, in a Spanish cloak, with the head of a greyhound licking a pendent hand which was thought as good as any of Vandyke's; Lady Mary Mordaunt by Lely, a beauty languishing in a somewhat indelicate robe of lilac satin; General Mordaunt of a later date in a full bottomed wig, (supposed to be by Kneller), down to Robert Mordaunt member for Launceston in the days of Pitt. There were a dozen others of almost every date; but as if to check family pride, there was nothing but a humble photograph of the present representative of so long a line, hung on one side of the huge carved stone fire-place: As a pendent to this was another photograph, which at first sight you would have

pronounced to be Margaret's. It was that of her mother, dead for many years, and close under it, as if of another of the dead, a water-colour sketch of a handsome boy of fifteen very like Evelyn.

The room itself was dark, but not comfortless. Certainly in the winter when the dogs were well piled with wood, it was a cheery place, if it had been a little less long ; and now in the summer, the sun streamed through panes of painted glass and threw over the floor and walls the warm *gules* and *or* of the quarterings of the Mordaunts. Altogether it was one of the most habitable rooms in the house, none the worse for being filled with furniture which may have been more than a century old.

On the two large tables was laid out an ample display of knick-nacks, old china and books ; but it is observable that these last had been changed last night, and that they were all so-called " Sunday books." This was one of the

few points on which Colonel Mordaunt was very strict.

He had, in fact, at one time been close upon the risk of turning from sinner to saint. Sinner he had been as a young man, wild, a gambler, a drinker, and a scoffer at all religion. Loss of money and the gain of a good wife nearly made a saint of him. But the Colonel was a man of sound sense, and managed to avoid actual canonization. His strict observances, in some particulars, were all that remained of his formal sanctity. His real sanctity, however, had increased with years, and the Colonel was a really good man with little or no humbug, certainly no cant, and one who did not live a completely useless or selfish life.

"What are you going to read, Meg, dear?" asked Evelyn, hovering doubtfully about the table.

"My dear Jeremy," answered Margaret, tucking a book under her arm.

"Oh! Jeremy Taylor. Then I think I

must go on with 'Miriam Fielding.'” Now as Evelyn said this and took up her book, she gave vent to just a quarter of a sigh and looked for one second as if she could have shed just a quarter of a tear. But why this? was it the intense dullness of 'Miriam Fielding,' a story of a young lady who rejects her lover because he declines to go to Church, and takes up with a young Curate who talks in Scripture language, and offers in a text? Not a bit of it. Evelyn liked the story immensely, and had read it all through last year, and was half through it again. Was it regret not being able to study “dear Jeremy?” scarcely. To Evelyn, the beautiful language of that good man would have been as intelligible as a Greek Testament, and at seventeen one can think little of holy dying, while a girl perhaps prefers holy loving (*i.e.* flirtation with curates) to holy living. But she did regret Jeremy Taylor all the same. She regretted that she was not clever enough to read books in which Margaret could take such

delight. She was reminded by the difference between Meg's Sunday book and of her own mental inferiority, and though she had too often been thus reminded to feel much pained at it, she just gave one little sigh over her own stupidity, and then strolled into the garden, to read by the side of the lake.

CHAPTER III.

A few words of explanation about Evelyn. When his wife died, Colonel Mordaunt determined to do his best to supply her place to his two little girls, for he had sent the boy to school, and for some time the widower consoled himself by forming the characters and drawing out the minds of his charges, a duty he performed scrupulously. But he soon found that there were many things necessary for girls to know, which he could not teach them, music and sewing, for instance, and took a governess into the house. This governess was too clever and not conscientious enough for the situation.

She could not with sufficient patience descend to those perpetual rudiments, which must be got over before the young mind can mount to actual knowledge, and when she found that Margaret, three years the senior of the two, had got over the elements, she devoted herself to her and left Evelyn to herself. Then, too, it had become the custom to say that Evelyn was stupid, and though from pure affection and amiability the little girl with the large staring eyes was willing and ready to learn all that was set before her, it was certainly true that, from want whether of encouragement or of ability, she made slow and little progress. In short, under Miss Harding's teaching, Margaret learned to play well, to sing prettily, to speak French and read German, and more than all in importance, to use her mind. She could understand what she heard and read, and she could think for herself and talk accordingly. On the other hand, Evelyn at the time our story opens, wrote an atrocious hand, could scarcely spell, expressed

herself—when she did talk—ill, knew nothing of history, geography or what not, and was nearly as ignorant of the commonest things as any girl out of the village. Yet Evelyn, though not quick, was not stupid. That was the common mistake, originating with Miss Harding and caught up by the Colonel. Painfully shy and retiring, she appeared stupid because she could not be brought to answer questions even when she knew the answers. In fact, she had been so continually told that she was a dunce, that she could never acquire sufficient confidence to believe that she was right. She wanted encouragement, and both the governess and the Colonel perpetually discouraged her. She should have been treated as a sensible responsible being, and she was always being laughed at as a fool or thrust in the back-ground. Not that the Colonel was unjust enough to show any decided partiality between his daughters, nor unfeeling enough to treat either with unkindness; but Margaret soon became his companion.

She could talk to him and understand him, could take her duties in the house, could amuse him with her quiet satires on their neighbours, and could receive his guests with an elegance and hospitality worthy of the Mordaunts.

For all this, Evelyn, in her way, was almost more attractive than Margaret, especially on first acquaintance. There was something so interesting in the monstrous deep blue eyes, in which you now saw a wild merriment, now a touch of melancholy, strange in so young a girl. And yet Evelyn began to know that the world is not all sunshine. She was too good to envy Margaret's success, but she was continually regretting her own want of it. It is not pleasant to be told you are a fool and to feel the truth of it, and not be able to help it. It is not pleasant to feel you are a bore, and to try to be less so, and only make the failure worse. The Colonel gave each the same outward affection, but Evelyn soon saw that he enjoyed Meggie's society more than hers.

She did what any girl of her age would have done. Instead of striving with all her energy to improve her mind, she withdrew into herself, took to habitual solitude and silence, and brooded rather morbidly over her own inferiority. At seventeen who, except the unthinking, is not more or less morbid? And when she found that she was not missed, she drew yet closer into herself, read her own books, played her own tunes of which she learned about two in a year, sat in her own room, or her own nooks in the grounds or on the hill, went her own way and became day after day less sociable and less fitted for society.

But where the mind is not largely developed, the feelings may be deep and lasting, but are scarcely vivid. They say insects do not feel, because they have no brain, and the rule holds good among human beings, the cleverest are not indeed those who feel most; but are those who feel most often, most excitedly, most variedly, and to whom everything is a matter of feeling.

The denser are often stunned by one absorbing grief, and you may prick them all over, they will not feel. In this respect, therefore, Evelyn was happier, perhaps, than if she had been cleverer. She certainly could be merry, even in her solitude, and to her simple mind such simple trifles brought enjoyment. You might hear her sing to herself in her own room only a few minutes after some thoughtless word had brought the tears into her eyes. But she was, in fact, an anomaly, and sometimes kindness would make her sullen, while cruelty had no effect upon her. Sometimes you might smile in vain to her, sometimes your angriest frown would be met with smiles.

But Evelyn had one charm, morbid and faulty as we shall find her. You might hear an angry, cruel word from Margaret, never from her sister. Meggie might and often did bring tears into Eve's eyes, and sent her to hide them in her own little room ; but never had a word passed little Lyn's lips, that could have wounded

the most susceptible. Poor Lyn, she was full of much love and affection, but rather from circumstances than from want of heart in others, she had never yet found one object on whom to pour out all the warmth within her.

Then, too, her life had been utterly eventless. Meggie had been to London; Evelyn had never seen a larger town than Launceston. Meggie had been asked to stay with the Bonds and the Palmers, and there seen society after a fashion. Lyn had no friends as yet to ask her, and she was too young perhaps to be invited. Lastly, Meggie had been to the balls and evening parties at the Pilgrims and elsewhere, but Lyn had lived for the last two years on the aroma of one, to her grandest ball of nearly fifty people given by Mr. Wytham, and had treasured with delight the faces and voices of the two or three partners who had been good-natured enough to dance with "that pretty little thing in short petticoats." In short, she had lived all her life at Marfield, with no expansion for her mind,

nothing but the merest trifles to make up the sum of her life. Sweet, gentle, humble Evelyn, would to heaven you had never had anything but those trifles to make or mar your happiness.

Now she goes to sit with "Miriam Fielding" on a low bank under the cedars and over the lake. She has a large marker in the book, showing the place where she left off last Sunday ; for much as she likes "Miriam Fielding," she never reads it on the week-days, when she can get a novel, such as the meagre circulating library of Launceston affords. She reads now half a page very diligently, and looks a picture as her long eye-lashes lie on the bosom of her soft cheek, and then she looks up, and her mind wanders entirely from the book to things of her own more natural life. She leaves the Curate on his knees before Miriam ; she does not hurry to learn her answer ; the momentous question has no moment for her, and she thinks with far more interest about that stone which

has caused such a ripple in the lake—I mean metaphorically—to wit, that couple of strangers who have roused the attention of the calm brooding population of Wilton. Then again she goes on for another half page, and reads nearly a whole page after this relaxation. She might even have accomplished two pages, if it had not been for the sound of a distant voice which caused her to look up. On the other side of the lake, which was after all little more than a large pond, the hill rose for some way quite perpendicularly in rocks, and above that slanted off to a considerable distance. Near the top of this hill was a little foot-path, and from there came the voices.

When she had looked up, she certainly became interested. It was no plough-boy hobbling along, no couple of cottagers wending their way to the village beer-shop, but none other than the two interesting strangers, engaged apparently in a vehement argument, since one of them was gesticulating violently, and from time to time

the distant voice grew louder, though it was too distant for her to hear what it said. Presently the calmer of the two laid his hand on the other's arm, and pointed to the view, sweeping his own arm round. Then both stood some moments silent and wrapt. Then they turned their eyes downwards, and one of them pointed to the lake or the house, and then much to her gratification, they began running like boys down the hill-side, leaping the clumps of gorse, and shouting to one another. Indeed so fast did they come that she trembled lest they should not see the rocks and fall over their edge, and she was not altogether wrong, for the foremost of them had some difficulty in bringing himself to a stop, just as he reached the very brink. She suppressed a scream of alarm, and then remembering with a kind of instinctive modesty, that she ought not to remain in view of the strangers, she rose and passed among the trees. However, she lingered where she could

not be seen, watched their faces, and listened to their remarks.

“What a romantic spot, Cunliffe,” said one. “It rewards me for nearly breaking my precious neck over these rocks. What a glorious old house, is it not? Heigh-ho! how much more taste had our forefathers’ architects than the builders of Cincinnati Villa, Camberwell or Rosemary Cottage, Highgate, ay, or even Sir Charles Barry or Scott himself, eh? Here is the Gothic pure, strong and effective, without finicking flummery, or twelfth-cake ornamentation, admirably adapted to dwelling-houses, in spite of Lord Palmerston, picturesque and convenient at the same time.”

“I fancy it is somewhat dark though inside, while I confess that a Grecian mansion would have spoiled this place completely. How well the house seems to agree with the cedars and the hills behind!”

“I tell you what, Preston,” (Evelyn caught and registered the name) “this is just the place

in which to find some quiet country girl,
some

“ High born maiden
In a palace-tower
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love which overflows her bower.”

“ Bah ! ten chances to one it contains none
but some cider-bibbing farmer, who rents the
mansion of old squirearchy for an old song.”

“ And ten to one, Preston, the farmer has a
daughter with a heart as simple as the morning
star, who will be decoying you from your
asceticism and playing the deuce with your
work.”

“ Well, I might do worse,” said Preston,
carelessly. “ After the fascinations of La
Manetta, a simple guileless country heart will
be a pleasant change. Shall we move up
again.”

Just then, Evelyn heard Margaret’s voice
calling her.

"My dear Eve," said she, reproachfully, as she came up to her, "it is much too late for you to be at the lake ; you will be having a cough again to-morrow."

"Meg dear, I've just seen those two strangers again. They came down to look at the house, and I have found out their names ; and I am sure they are going to stay here from what I heard them say."

So then she repeated the whole conversation to Meggie.

"Well, you are a nice thing to be eaves-dropping, but you have heard good of the house, if not of yourself. Come in, child."

The evening passed somewhat calmly, as usual. The Colonel, who exempted newspapers from the list of profane reading, ensconced himself behind the Saturday's "Times," while Mr. Wytham talked to Margaret about books—her favourite topic, and Evelyn read, or thought she was reading, another page or two of "Miriam."

At nine precisely, Mr. Wytham's dog-cart was announced to be at the door. At half-past nine the servants assembled, and the Colonel read some rather lengthy prayers which included the whole possible category of saints and sinners for whom one would ever desire to pray, Her Majesty and the Bishops heading the list which ended with the "benighted races of Africa;" and at ten all moved off to their respective bed-rooms.

Evelyn, however, had a long candle about which Margaret made a remark, as usual:

"I'm sure, Eve, you don't want to set up to-night. What on earth can you have to do?"

Eve only answered by kissing her, and ran off to her room.

The little inner-room which she used as a boudoir or study was redolent of Evelyn; and here you began to understand her character somewhat better. It was old-maidish in the extreme, and so well did Evelyn love every thing about it, that I verily believe she would

have refused the hand of an Adonis, if marriage compelled her to quit that little bower ; and yet in itself it was far from either pretty or comfortable. It was the worst furnished room in the house, and at once betrayed the fact that its owner had, with her usual timidity, collected for this room none but such scraps and waifs as nobody else could possibly use. The one high-backed chair must have given way with any body but Evelyn, who had for the last two years sat on it at her peril, yet had never dreamed of asking to have it mended. The table, a common deal one, had one leg shorter than the rest, and was only kept steady by a piece of doubled card which was repeatedly slipping from under it to the detriment of Evelyn's correspondence. Then to complete the uncomfortable appearance, there were two or three large wooden boxes in one corner of the room, and odds and ends of every kind were here stowed away. All the disabled umbrellas, and superannuated walking-sticks seemed to have

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found an asylum here. But if you had offered to carry them off, Eve would have screamed for mercy.

She was in fact a relic-worshipper ; and this room was the oratory in which she pursued her devotions—not, as yet, little Lyn, to any substantial saint—but to the memories of the Past, all eventless as it had been. These drawings of Meggie's, for instance, which were struck on the wall by aid of pins, were of neighbouring spots some visit to which had been for a certain period the era of her quiet life. Those neatly kept drawers were filled with labelled fragments, such as blades of grass from Loxmore, a piece of brick from the Wynch, even to a “lock of dear, dear Fur's hair.” Fur being the name of Messrs. Muff, Boa and Tippet's mamma, some time deceased. Then the few books on the table derived far more value in Miss Lyn's eyes, from the fact that they were all positively her own, than from any consideration of their intrinsic merits. In short this old maid of seven-

teen loved possession, and could never give up a thing which she had once possessed, so that an extraordinary accumulation ere long filled her drawers, and the fact of a thing's being worn out seemed to be its highest recommendation in her eyes.

It was here then in this little room that, surrounded by all that she knew and loved, the relic-worshipper was happy, while she was too unselfish to care for its want of comfort. Here she passed long solitary days undisturbed by a single intruder, working or reading, turning her dresses or retrimming her hats, and doing work which many of the sex indignantly disclaim as "slaving." Not that this conduct is quite praiseworthy, and at times both the Colonel and Margaret complain of her want of sociability, whereon Evelyn who has never been known to give an answer to reproaches, looks down till the tears run quite over the brink of those saucer eyes, thinks herself very wicked, and for the next week or so gives up

the little room, and brings down the most treasured of the relics in her capacious pocket.

On the present occasion, however, she is going neither to read nor work, but to perform a duty which she has imposed on herself every night for the last three years. She takes from a drawer three copy books, and a box of pens, and the inkstand, which, as it was a present from her father, she considers too precious to leave on the table. Then she sits down with a grave air, as that of a person about to pen some all-important document of state, she spreads out her writing materials with the same solemn look, and prepares to add the day's portion to her voluminous diary.

From the gravity of the preparations one is inclined to expect very grand results, a complete work of art, secretly destined like too many journals for eventual publication; but no—poor little Evelyn is not an author, and what is more she is not vain. Her diary is the simplest record. The copy books are made

express for a diary, but of a rather inferior order, for Evelyn has to buy them out of her own very limited pocket-money, almost all of which she gives away in charity. The spaces are not large for each day, and from the lists of weights and measures, of fair days and markets, and still more from the counting table at the end, one is inclined to think the diary was intended for the small tradesman rather than the sentimental young lady. But Evelyn is quite satisfied with it, and having bought three of the pattern, will not be induced to change it, though she might live for a century. Then the entries are made in a neat rather formal hand, and it must be confessed are quite the reverse of sentimental. Thus since the next week is not so very important we will give her account of it as a specimen.

“*Sunday.* A fine day, went to church in the morning, Mr. Thornton preached ; a very nice sermon. Went to church in the afternoon, Mr. Moore preached. Two strangers in church.

I fed the dogs, and Mr. Wytham dined with us. Sat after dinner on the green corner, and saw the two strangers on the hill, I was so frightened."

Now there are some remarks necessary on this entry. Imprimis, the words "fed the dogs and Mr. Wytham dined with us," were written much more hurriedly than the rest, the fact being that they were to be found in every Sunday's entry, and were therefore less important. Next while Mr. Thornton's sermon is praised, Mr. Moore's is not. There are two reasons for this; the first that Evelyn did not like Mr. Moore's sermons, and yet never wrote anything disparaging of any one; the second though she did not think of it, she had heard little or nothing of the said discourse, her thoughts being very improperly occupied with the two strangers. The next entry was even more common place.

"*Monday.* A dull day. Did not go out because I did not feel well. Nothing happened."

Then came.

“*Tuesday*. A finish day. Read some French in the morning, practised, and then went by myself to see poor Mrs. Barber, and coming back, who should I meet but the strangers in a carriage driving from Launceston. Saw Mr. Wytham in the distance. The Clarkes called in the afternoon. I had to talk to Mrs. Clarke ; and I was very frightened. Meg was gone out.”

“*Wednesday*. A dull day, but cleared up later. Papa poorly in the morning. Practised till twelve, and then took some soup to Mrs. Barber. In the afternoon Mr. Wytham called, and was very amusing. I was so glad, because papa was out of spirits before. Mr. Wytham said he had heard all about the two strangers. One of them who is called Cunliffe, is gone away again, but the other whose name is Preston is gone to live at the Wynch already. It is very odd of him, but Meg and I couldn't help saying we were so glad. Mr. Wytham says he thinks

Mr. Preston must be very ecentric, if not quite mad, but says he will call on him. I wish we should know him, because papa wants neighbours to amuse him."

This entry is only remarkable for the use it makes of papa's name. The fact is, that the Colonel did occasionally give way to fits of ill-temper, which he generally vented on Evelyn. She never dreamed, though, of calling these attacks aught else than illness. Compare too the meagreness of the next :

"*Thursday.* A very fine day. Went this morning with Meg to see old Stephens, who is ill. Met Mr. Preston as we came back. Meg's hat flew off and he picked it up for her. Mr. Mrs. and Miss Louisa Bond called."

Yet here indeed had been an eventful day for her. These girls always doing some good work had gone to sit with old Stephens, taking to the old grumbler some little unusual comfort, and intending to read to him. Jim had no sooner seen them from the work-shed

behind, than he came awkwardly in, and volunteered a little conversation in which he attempted to cover confusion by a kind of surly bluntness. Evelyn always wishing to please every one, and not knowing what to say, had admired the clump of carved vine-leaves that hung against the wall. Jim certainly blushed up with pleasure, if a kind of dark brown glow can be called blush, muttered something about it's being a mere trifle, and then suddenly seized with a gallant idea, took it down from the wall, and holding it out to her, grunted out : "It's quite at your service, if you think it pretty." Now like all girls of seventeen, Evelyn never accepted anything without first refusing it, and in this case it was doubly awkward to accept. She coloured up therefore and declined the present. Jim was mightily offended, hung the ornament up again, stuck his hands into his pockets, and leaning against the chimney-piece began to whistle. Fortunately, Margaret rose to go at this minute,

and Jim following them out returned to his shed, and watched them mount the glen again. They had just come to the brow of the hill, when bounding down the rocks in company, as it were, came a sharp breeze and Mr. Preston, singing at the top of his voice and evidently delighted with the fresh air, the exercise and the country. The wind took Meggie's hat off, Mr. Preston picked it up in a minute, presented it very politely to her, but without saying a word, scarcely glanced at either of them, and went on his way, singing again at once as if life was full of mirth, and little thinking what an observed individual he was.

He did, however, go the length of saying to himself, "Humph, a pretty girl on these wild hills. Well, I believe in the legend of St. Kerin. Bother it, I thought I *was* out of the world at the Wynch. Not a bit of it, I begin to think Cunliffe was right."

And such in fact was the first interview between Evelyn and a man who was to have the

most important influence on her life. Little did either of them imagine it.

The entries for Thursday and Friday were not remarkable, and it was not till Sunday when Mr. Wytham joined them as usual after the service that they heard anything about the stranger. But the little scene of the hat had been watched by Jim. "Ahy," he growled to himself, "she wouldn't have refused it from him or anything. It's always the case, the 'gentleman' has all the chance, and the honest workman be he the best and cleverest, must sing for it if he cannot raise himself."

Mr. Wytham's report was disappointing, particularly to the young ladies, but then it was not quite a true one, and just such a one as the world circulates without asking any farther.

"Sorry for your romantic impressions, Miss Margaret—very sorry to damp your admiration," said the wisp of a man, buttoning his coat again, "but the interesting stranger turns out to be a retired gamester."

Evelyn turned pale and Margaret exclaimed, "Disgraceful."

"By which I don't quite mean a swindler—though the one very soon becomes the other—but an army man and a member of the Rag, a man of some family but who cannot keep his hands from picking and stealing with the cards as an excuse."

"But why does he come down here," asked Meggie, "no one plays in Wilton."

"That's just it. The really romantic part of the story is, that he has ruined himself, lost every penny he had, and come down to live in that tumble-down Wynch 'to see if he can cure his distempered brain,' as Mad Tom says."

"Come, that alters the case, rather," the Colonel put in.

"I suppose he can't help himself, and has taken the cheapest house he can find without lowering his position. But I hear he has not a scrap of furniture, eats very little of anything,

and drinks nothing but water—quite a hermit, Miss Margaret.”

“Poor fellow,” escaped from Eve, but nobody ever noticed what Eve said, so she was spared any blushes.

But Mr. Wytham did not know human—especially feminine—nature, if he thought that this bad account would lessen the interest in Preston. The girls openly condemned, but secretly felt for the ruined gamester, and the Colonel when he had ascertained that he was of good family, gentlemanly habits, and not quite so black as painted, determined, with his usual good-nature, to call on him. It was perhaps foolish in a man with two young daughters; but the Colonel often felt very dull, and really the prospect of “an officer and a gentleman” was too much for him.

“And have you seen him, papa,” both the girls asked.

“Most absurd thing—there’s no bell to the house at all, and I could neither get in, or make

any one hear. There did not seem to be the slightest sign of life about the place, and all just in the same rickety condition as ever."

"What did you do, dear papa?"

"I put my card in through a broken pane of glass and have no idea whether he will ever get it."

Evelyn sincerely hoped that he would.

CHAPTER IV.

"AH, Miss Margaret, I see you have adopted my suggestion. Upon my word I think I never saw Conservatism look so becoming as in your bonnet-strings."

"But, Evelyn, you see, Mr. Wytham, has gone a step further. She is Conservative from top to toe."

"Just like Evelyn," said the Colonel, "I'll be bound she doesn't know the difference between Conservative and Liberal."

"Don't you, Miss Evelyn? then let me tell you. Conservative means all that is good, and pleasant, and honorable, and fit for country

people, while Liberal means all that is townish and impudent and cockneyfied."

"Then, please papa, I think I will be Conservative."

A roar of laughter followed Evelyn's weighty decision.

"I'll tell you how I interpret the names, Lyn," said her father. "Conservative means old-fashioned nonsense, poor and proud; and Liberal means to go-a-head and make plenty of money. If I hadn't been bred a Tory, most decidedly I should be a Whig from preference, Wytham. But now, let me ask, how do you propose to get these young ladies in and out of L——? I trust them to you, Wytham, and if their colours get them mobbed, I shall make you pay for new dresses—yellow next time."

"Oh, papa! yellow is so ugly," said Evelyn. On which, there was another round of laughter, which little Eve did not mind at all.

At last they mounted the high curricule.

Mr. Wytham and Margaret sat in the front, Evelyn by herself in the back seat. The diminutive groom who had brought it round, waddled away home—off went the horses, and the Colonel looking after them, hemmed and hawed to himself and wondered if they would come back all right.

The hustings was outside the town, but the road from the committee rooms to the fields was the great scene of excitement, and it was here that the great work of hostility went on.

The girls really looked very pretty in their bright dresses and new hats. They always improved their toilettes when they went in to Launceston; but when they were to go with Mr. Wytham in that roomy, old-fashioned, but highly respectable curricule of his, behind a pair of spirited horses, they felt it incumbent on them to come out in their most striking attire. The day was bright, there were many carriages on the road and Mr. Wytham was very attentive in telling Miss Margaret the

private histories of the occupants as they passed. Little Evelyn sat behind and thought about nothing in particular. She had rather a habit, the poor dear child, of thinking about nothing.

The town was of course in a state of ferment when they reached. It had just been increased by a handbill which had appeared like magic on the walls, bearing the mystic question,

“How about the idiot?”

and the simple enquiry had lashed the Conservatives to fury. The allusion was to the Tory candidate, a neighbouring country gentleman, who for the sake of her £30,000 had espoused a poor wretched deformed creature, so bereft of intelligence, that she could scarcely be got to go through the marriage service. The act had been much condemned in L—— at the time, but forgotten until the placard recalled it. But the Tories were not long in taking their revenge and half an hour later one read everywhere:

“How about Mother Fry?”

which exasperated the Liberals, their candidate being a large sugar-boiler of the town who owned some house property in the place, and had a short time before treated with great severity one of his tenants, an old woman of 90. With such sweet personalities was the war being waged when Mr. Wytham drove into the High Street.

He drew up suddenly to speak to a friend, who had some important communication to make, and he was obliged to get down for a few minutes.

"Miss Margaret," said he, "you are such a whip that I can trust you to drive round to the Abbey and wait for me there. You can go by Water Street, so that you will avoid all the crowd."

Margaret was delighted, she liked nothing better than driving, and was really a tolerable whip. Mr. Wytham disappeared into a shop, and she touched up the horses and proceeded bravely up the street. Evelyn leaned over to speak to her.

"Meg, dear, wouldn't it be fun to go past the Shire Hall and see what we can of the election?"

"I don't think we ought to without Mr. Wytham."

"Oh! do, Meg dear. It will be so amusing."

Margaret certainly did not turn down Water Street, when they came to it, and drove on in spite of her scruples. But when they came to see the immense noisy crowd collected in front of the Shire Hall, from a window of which some worthy was gesticulating violently, making a doubtless brilliant harangue, which was audible only to the half-dozen people around him, she thought better of the wild attempt and wanted to turn back. This, however, was not so easy; the High Street was narrow in this place, and there was a line of carts and carriages along the side of the pavement. Margaret felt nervous, but drove on, and before she could turn was in the middle of the crowd. The Liberal

Committee room happened to be closed to the Shire Hall, and here the votes were being bought rapidly, and the voters having received their money were being marched off to the hustings each in custody of an agent of some kind, who could not trust them to poll for the right man if allowed to go alone. The "free and independent" were just then at a premium. Once their votes polled, and they would be worthless to either party. Beyond, however, a strong body of Conservatives were placed with a view to carrying off all the voters they could, and from time to time there was a scuffle which often threatened to end in a riot.

The moment the Liberal mob saw the well known Conservative curricie with the young ladies in Tory colours, a cry was raised. Nothing exceeds an English mob in brutality, and young ladies were for the moment as good game as any one else. In a minute the carriage was surrounded, and a volley of polite and delicate observations levelled at its pretty occu-

pants ; hisses and hoots were raised, and the frightened horses began to plunge and rear. Margaret lost her presence of mind, and Evelyn pale as death, implored her to drive on. She took the reins and touched up the horses, but this only made the matter worse. The hooting increased, the mob expecting some fun closed round the carriage, and the animals more frightened than ever reared in a manner which was quite beyond Margaret's skill. The crowd laughed, jeered, hooted, and offered no assistance. The next moment one of the horses made a side plunge, which drove back the crowd but nearly upset the curricie, dragging it almost across the road. The animal recovering, plunged in the opposite direction and in a moment more the vehicle would have been smashed against a lamp-post, when Margaret felt the reins and whip snatched from her trembling hand, heard the latter cracked first over the heads of the horses, and then over those of the crowd—heard a strong manly voice shout : “ Out of the way

there, or I will drive over you," and before she could recover herself, found that they were dashing up the High Street and free from the crowd. Very cool and very determined, and quietly shortening rein till he brought the frightened animals to a smart trot, there sat by her side none other than that Mr. Preston, who appeared to be quite at home in Mr. Wytham's curricie. He, however, took no notice of the young ladies, so that when Margaret, after exchanging a meaning look with Evelyn, began to falter out—"We are very much obliged to you"—he had the ill-breeding to turn round and give a long sharp whistle. This was answered in a moment by a huge rough stag-hound, which came bounding after the carriage with its long tail moving to and fro slowly in the air, and a short deep bark which seemed to say, "all right governor." Then indeed Mr. Preston condescended to turn round to Margaret.

"I sold that dog to a Yorkshireman," he

said, still drawing in the horses with a firm hand, "when I came here about a month ago. The night before last I had been about an hour in bed, when I was awoke by a most unearthly howl. I dare say you know a house called the Wynch, near Wilton—"

"Oh! yes, quite well," cried Margaret and Evelyn in a breath. Evelyn was leaning over and already staring at the stranger while she listened.

"Well, it is rather a gloomy place, and I happen to live there quite by myself. You can imagine that any unusual noise—that is, any but that of the rats and bats who are kind enough to lodge with me, but decline to pay rent—is not very re-assuring, and this noise in particular resembled the groan of ghoul or vampire—not that I ever had the pleasure of hearing such beings groan—more than any thing else I could think of for the time being. I waited, and heard it repeated. I then struck a light, got up, and searched the house, guided

by the noise. It seemed to be in the passage down-stairs, but the moment I got there—of course it stopped. However I listened and presently heard a scuffle outside the door. I opened it a little way, and the individual outside opened it with a push the rest, and the next moment sprang at my throat, bounded up and down, uttering short sharp barks and announced to me in all the clearness of canine language that he had come to take up a permanent residence there and was very glad to see me."

"That dog?" asked Margaret in amazement.

"That dog. He had found his way from Yorkshire to the Wynch, certainly 150 miles, and there he was."

"Oh! the dear creature," exclaimed Eve, enthusiastically. Mr. Preston turned half way round to her.

"I think you're fond of dogs. I saw you with two or three the other day on the other hill."

Evelyn blushed up at being spoken to so directly by the handsome and eccentric stranger, but he fortunately did not wait for her reply.

"It is very courageous of you to drive a curricule up here on such a day as this," he said to Meggie, "but these horses when set off are too strong for you, I think—that off one has nearly pulled my arm out of its socket already; have you no servant or gentleman with you?"

He talked with such complete ease, as if he had known them for years, instead of being ignorant of their very name, that, although he made not the slightest approach to familiarity or freedom, Margaret felt it her duty to draw up and reply stiffly.

"Thank you, we have a friend waiting for us at the Abbey. We are much indebted to you for helping us out of our difficulty, but need not trouble you any longer, I am sure."

Preston no sooner caught the word Abbey,

than he turned the horses down a narrow lane that led to it.

"It was very impertinent of me," he said laughingly, "to jump up into your carriage; but I assure you if I had not done so, you would not now be sitting here. Those idiots only want an excuse for a row, they don't care a jot about Whig and Tory; in fact they don't know the difference between them—who does in the present day? but if Blue has paid them, they are ready to annihilate Yellow, and vice versa. Do you see those men?"

He pointed with his whip to a band of some twenty stout powerful navvies, who, armed each with a short heavy bludgeon, were marching in the most regular order down towards the hustings. They were quiet, orderly and determined, they had been hired to intimidate voters and, if necessary, to break heads, and were quite ready for it.

"Every body in Launceston knows what those men have been hired to do; everybody

knows that they are going down to the field ; everybody knows it is illegal to intimidate voters ; everybody knows it is illegal and disgraceful, to disturb the peace, as these men have been paid to do, yet nobody interferes. The police are scarcely strong enough to do so, the roughs would leave very little of them left in a pitched battle, and even if they were strong enough, they would never stop them till the fight commenced. In a town like this, they would not think their member elected without a band of roughs being present—they are quite accustomed to it.”

“ But they can punish them.”

“ Pardon me. If the police can manage to capture one or two, they may, but that is highly improbable ; and only in case of a fight. But these men go to intimidate, and will only fight if absolutely necessary. Then when the Petition comes, no one can find out who hired the roughs ; the member swears to his innocence ; his agent swears to his ; one sub-agent

swears another thing, and another committee-man or sub-agent, who might be guilty, has conveniently absconded. It is all part of an absurd and disgraceful system, and these elections are a great sham. Better at once sell the seats in the House to the highest bidders. It would save a deal of immorality, a deal of money to the candidates, and not a few broken heads—well, here we are.”

And so saying, he quietly turned into the Abbey Close, where Mr. Wytham was already waiting, at once detected that gentleman as the protector of the young ladies, and drove close up to him. Mr. Wytham’s dismay was not slight, when he saw a strange gentleman driving *his* curricie ; but this was turned to disgust, when a few seconds later, he found the said gentleman to be no other than the doubtful Mr. Preston. That individual took no notice of the very ill-tempered look on Mr. Wytham’s face, but jumping down, handed over the reins to him, bowed and took off his

hat to Margaret, saying : " You are now safe," and whistling to his dog, walked off towards the High Street again.

Now, if there was one thing more than another about which Mr. Wytham was touchy, it was his horses. He had entrusted them to Miss Margaret as a particular mark of his favour, and he had such confidence in her good sense, that he certainly had never expected to be kept waiting two minutes—which he called ten—at the Abbey, and then to find that that discreet young lady had taken up a stranger without introduction into his curricie. Evelyn quaked at his black look as he took his seat, and without turning his head, grumpily inquired : " Which shop do you want to go to first ?"

But Margaret was not at all alarmed ; for she had lately been discovering her own influence over the old bachelor, and was rather glad of an occasion to show it.

" We have had a most amusing adventure,

Mr. Wytham," she said gaily. "Haven't we, Eve? It's all your fault for making us wear Conservative colors, and were very nearly being mobbed, if it had not been for that darling man coming to the rescue—"

"Darling, indeed!" grunted Mr. Wytham with a very grim smile, and settling his head in his high blue cravat. "I don't know what the Colonel will say to me for letting you make the acquaintance of 'darlings' in this fashion."

"Oh! you know it's not the Colonel you care about. It's only those precious horses of yours, and it was just their fault that anything happened. If they had not jibbed just in the middle of the crowd too, it would have been all right."

"But if Miss Margaret had gone down Water Street, as I told her—"

"But Miss Margaret, you see, chose to take her own way."

Mr. Wytham smiled a little less grimly. He was pleased at being bullied by Miss Mar-

garet, and so he contented himself with asking the particulars of the adventure, and drove the young ladies most patiently about from shop to shop. Finally, having heard from a friend whom he drew up to speak to that the Conservatives were then five a-head, he regained his equanimity, and himself drove them down the High in order to see the state of poll at the Conservative Committee room. By this time the free and independant electors were getting very excited and very drunk. The Blues glorying in their tiny majority were jeering mercilessly at the Yellows, whose agents, sober and active to the last were making the most strenuous efforts to collect their adherants, and no longer affording to be cautious, were flourishing bank-notes openly in their committee room. The street was more crowded than ever, for the free and independants having given their votes, and caring not a stiver which party won, had returned in large numbers from the hustings to enter the one hun-

dred and one public-houses along the street. Round the door of each noisy house knots of these patriotic gentlemen were collected, fights were beginning here and there, and the whole scene presented a fine illustration of the careful, deliberate and honest manner in which the people of England take care to form the Senate that is to govern them.

Just in the place where the crowd was thickest, and Mr. Wytham was making fruitless efforts to drive through it, Evelyn touched Margaret and said timidly: "There's Mr. Preston," and there sure enough he was, standing at the door of a small beer shop with a notebook in his hand, and a queer sardonic smile on his face. Margaret drew Mr. Wytham's attention to him. He certainly looked very much out of place there. Mr. Wytham in looking at him, neglected his horses for a moment, and the same refractory animal, unaccustomed to a crowd, took it into its silly head to jib again in precisely the same manner as

before. Therefore there was fresh excitement ; Mr. Wytham stood up, shook his reins loose, lashed the offender on his haunches and did all he could—but in vain, for full five minutes the creature refused to go on, and all this time Evelyn was staring anxiously at Preston, expecting him again to come to the rescue. He did nothing of the kind. He only looked up, smiled at their dilemma, and then went on with his notes. She thought it very unkind of him.

At last they were off again, and as they drove home, Margaret, of course, triumphed over the old bachelor, and rated him so cruelly that he protested he would not keep the jibbing horse a day longer. Though there was nothing very extraordinary in all this, this election day was long remembered by Evelyn, and became quite an era in her life. She now felt, she could not tell why, a decided interest in the tenant of the Wynch, and I am afraid thought a great deal of him, whenever she

thought at all. He was certainly a very eccentric person, and his great coolness was perhaps rather attractive. Then, too, he had spoken to her, and had evidently noticed her ; and as little Eve was quite unaccustomed to be noticed by any one, this very slight attention was not lost upon her.

As for Margaret, she described the hero of the day in such glowing terms to the Colonel, that the old gentleman made up his mind he should like, in spite of Wytham's hints and surmises, to make his acquaintance. He felt certain his unlucky card had never reached him, and even thought of calling again.

For some days Margaret and Evelyn were on the look out for Preston in their walks. They now always went up the hills as much as possible in the direction of the Wynch, but as they never saw their hero, Margaret at last gave it up as useless. Not so Evelyn, who where she had an interest, was the incarnation of patience. She now never went out without

taking the three dogs, for the simple reason that the interesting stranger had mentioned having seen her with them, and at last one day she was rewarded by a little adventure for her perseverance. She was walking quietly down the hill, two of the dogs were away somewhere in the thick gorse, while Muff, the largest of the three, was walking on solemnly behind her, as if he felt that his protection was necessary, when she suddenly heard a low deep growl. Turning round, she saw Preston's stag-hound and Muff engaged in the preliminaries of war. They were walking suspiciously round one another, tails erect, ears cocked and a generally hostile look in their eyes, as they uttered low thundering growls. At the same time Mr. Preston appeared at the top of the hill, singing at the top of his voice, and unconscious that he had a listener. The two dogs were well matched, and they seemed to know it, for in another moment they turned upon one another furiously. Evelyn was in agony, they

would be sure to tear one another to pieces, and though she called to Muff with all the command she could muster, that individual was determined to commit murder or die in the attempt. At the noise of the scuffle the two other dogs perked their heads up out of the gorse and were bounding eagerly down on the combatants, when Mr. Preston came down the hill like an avalanche. There was not a moment to lose. If the other two animals arrived before him, Wolf, his stag-hound would have been torn to bits in two minutes. Fortunately at this juncture both dogs rolled over, Wolf being uppermost, and Eve cried in alarm for Muff. Mr. Preston seized his dog with both hands by the ears and pulled him off; but Muff was not such a "muff" after all, and clung on to the other's throat.

"Drag him off," shouted Preston to Eve, seeing that the other two were close upon them. "Drag him off!"

Little Eve did not want pluck, and she knew

Muff too well to think he would turn upon her, so that she boldly seized his tail and pulled him away with all her might. The scene was delightfully ridiculous for everybody but the combatants, Muff retiring with a bleeding ear and Wolf with a wound in the throat.

"Thrash your dog," cried Preston, administering a chastisement that sent Wolf yelping back many a yard ; but Evelyn's little hand had no other effect on Muff, than to induce him to lick it, in the interval of the deep growls which he still gave vent to.

"I hope he's not hurt," cried Preston, and then without waiting for an answer, continued his run down the hill and was soon out of sight, which Evelyn thought very disagreeable of him.

Meetings of this kind occurred again and again with more or less (generally less) of incident in them, and still the acquaintance made no progress. When the stranger met the young ladies, he suddenly bowed and passed

on, though they would have given anything to be able to speak to him. He was still a recluse, and as Mr. Wytham did not altogether approve of him, nobody called at the Wynch, except the Rector, who did so as a matter of duty.

About a week later, the Colonel and Evelyn were calling at the Rectory, when after the usual dull topics had been well discussed, the Wynch was suddenly mentioned. Evelyn was at this moment undergoing affectionate torture from Miss Thornton, a tall, stout girl, with a hankering after High Church and ferns.

“And that, dear,” she was saying, turning over the leaves of a large blotting book and displaying her dried plants, “that, dear is also a new one which I got at Torquay—*Adiantum nigrum*—isn’t it a sweet one. Then here’s some more false maiden hair; that is, you see, *polypodium*, and this is a foreign one; can you read the name?”

Evelyn had already endured thirty pages of this diminutive science, appearing always in-

tently interested, but secretly listening to the conversation of the elders, when at the word "Wynch" she fairly abandoned *polypodium* and *adiantum nigrum*, and looked anxiously at the Rector.

"You see," Mr. Thornton was saying in his heavy pompous manner, "he is a regular attendant at church, once and sometimes even twice on Sundays, and I have been rather pleased to notice that he takes notes of my sermons."

The worthy man might well be pleased. No one else could, or ever had done such a thing.

"Then, since his arrival, he has attended the sacrament regularly each time, and I hear nothing whatever to make me think that he is anything more than eccentric. He certainly is that. I was really astounded at the state of the Wynch. Not dirty, oh! no. I hear he has Mrs. Powell there twice a-week to scrub and clean up everything—and it's a great assistance to the poor woman. But she tells

me that when she has to clean his study, he never leaves it, but goes on reading and writing just the same, quite indifferent to dust or anything."

"Then, what is there about it?" asked the Colonel.

"Its extreme dilapidation, just the same as before he came there. Except just in two rooms, which I suppose are his study and bed-room; there is not a single window mended in the place. Mrs. Powell tells me that he has had a small stove put into the kitchen, and cooks everything for himself. She says she was there one day when he was at dinner, and there was nothing to eat but soup, potatoes, and bread. His big dog sat opposite to him, and while he himself ate, he threw lumps of bread to the animal. He seems good-natured, for he insisted on the poor woman's sitting down and sharing his meal."

"Does he eat no meat?"

“ Oh, yes ! he buys chops and steaks himself at Brigg’s, and has them sent up to him.”

“ Did you find him a gentleman, then ?”

“ In manners, quite so. But I was talking of the appearance of the place. He let me in himself, apologized for the want of a bell, and said, that as he never had any visitors, he thought it needless to put one up. Then he took me into what I suppose is his study. Will you believe it, the room was literally crammed with books, ranged round on the floor and lying about in all directions. There were two deal tables in it, with large folios lying open on them. I noticed one or two black-letter books, and on one of them a desk covered with MS. But there were only two chairs, one of them a wicker-work rocker, which he asked me to take. ‘ That,’ said he, ‘ is my thinking chair.’ ”

“ And how as to conversation ?”

“ Most sensible and agreeable. We talked a little politics, in which he seemed well versed.

I noticed several newspapers lying about the place. And then we came on the subject of the parish. He asked me hundreds of questions about it, said he had wished to see me, to learn all about the place, as he knew but little of country villages, and thought ours looked so thoroughly happy and cheerful."

"Ah, he has not seen much of it yet," said the Colonel, with a sigh.

"I beg your pardon. I was astonished to find that he had already visited a great number of the poor, and has even been into the schools. We talked about these and the club-meetings, and, in short, every possible subject in connection with the village, and I assure you that I came away with a very high opinion of his talents."

At this juncture, Evelyn was recalled to a consciousness of her absence of mind by Miss Thornton, who had twice asked her if she would like to come and see the aviary, and now repeated the question with some irritability.

"Oh! the aviary—oh! if you please, very much."

Just then, however, the door was thrown open, and the servant announced "Mr. Preston."

His tall figure seemed to fill up the doorway as he entered; but surprise, though well concealed, was not the less felt, by all, at his dress, which was what he wore every day in his walks—a black velvet shooting-coat, large hessian boots, and a wide-awake crushed in his hand. It was certainly an eccentric dress for making a call.

"How do you do, Mr. Thornton," he said in an off-hand way, sinking easily into a chair. "I have just been over to L—— for my papers—you see my pockets are full of them. I thought I would take you on my way back, and be the first to circulate news in Wilton, which is, I dare say, not quite unexpected. There is to be a petition against the Conservative Member. Ha! ha! it is really ridiculous."

“It is a very great shame,” said the Rector severely, for he was a staunch Tory. “But let me introduce you; my daughter, Mr. Preston, and this is one of my and your neighbours—Colonel Mordaunt.”

A great deal of bowing ensued, somewhat ceremoniously on the Colonel’s part, and with great ease and elegance on that of the new comer.

“I regret that Mrs. Thornton is not at home—Miss Evelyn Mordaunt, Mr. Preston.”

Mr. Preston bowed slightly and smiled, and then sitting down again turned full upon Evelyn.

“I hope your dog’s ear is not damaged, Miss Mordaunt; I can assure you, he nearly killed my poor Wolf. I dragged him off only just in time. You heard of the fight which our respective followers had the other day, Colonel Mordaunt? I was glad to see you send out your daughter under good protection—three strong Newfoundlands

would keep off an army of tramps and beggars ; though by the way, Mr. Thornton, you seem to have very few of either about here—how is that?”

“ We are not on the high road, you see ; and as for beggars, I suppose they know we have too many poor of our own to give anything away.”

“ Ah, poor fellows, we have too little pity for them. A man must be very miserable or very hardened to beg in this world. I should think there was more disappointment in that profession than in any other ; but you have plenty of gipsies about. Do you know, Miss Thornton, I slept in a gipsy’s tent the other night for the first time in my life ?”

“ In a gipsy’s tent !” exclaimed all together.

“ Was it not romantic ? Are you romantic, Miss Thornton ?—No ! then I am sure Miss Mordaunt is so—”

“ Fearfully so,” said the Colonel, laughing.
“ I wish any one would cure Lyn of it. But

how did you come to sleep in such strange quarters?"

"Very simply. I passed a small camp of four or five tents as I was coming home. I always had a leaning towards gipsies, and as one black-skinned ruffian very civilly asked for charity, I began talking to him in the few gipsy words I have picked up. He had a father who was very ill in the tent, and I went in and sat down to talk to him. They are a shamefully maligned race. No one under the sun treats you better than a Romany if you are kind to him. They gave me some supper, in which I thought I tasted something of a barn-door fowl stolen from a neighbouring farm-yard probably; they talked to me for hours of their travels, their adventures, their miscellaneous occupation, and all their clever disreputable ways of making a living, and as they offered me a bed, I thought I would try the effect of sleeping on straw under canvas rags, and I assure you I slept very well."

"Oh ! weren't you afraid?"

"You might have been robbed and murdered."

"Not at all. I would rather sleep in a gipsy's tent any day than in a London lodging-house. By the way, Colonel Mordaunt, we had a man of your name in our regiment for a short time—I don't know if he was any relation."

"What regiment?" asked the Colonel very gravely.

"The —th. Dragoons."

Every one was looking down, and the Colonel turned very pale.

"He was only there for a few months—an excellent fellow—everybody liked him," said Preston seeing the effect of this speech, and supposing that he had called up some dead relation.

"That, Sir," said the Colonel gravely, with a quivering lip, "was my son."

Preston turned the conversation, speaking

somewhat less carelessly, and then the Colonel and Evelyn rose to go.

"I don't know, Mr. Preston," said the Colonel, as he shook his hand, "if you ever got a card that I left for you at the Wynch, I found no one at home and put it in at one of the windows."

"Oh! you were very kind. I shall do myself the pleasure of returning your visit, and make a search for the card. I am such a recluse—a mere student in fact—that I have not provided myself with a letter-box, thinking I should have few, if any, visitors; I must really have one put up."

At the door as they came out, they found Wolf stretched at full length, whining somewhat impatiently for his master.

"Well, Lyn," said the Colonel, as they walked back, "what do you think of Mr. Preston?"

"What do you think of him, papa. I intend to think the same as you." Which

Evelyn said in perfect sincerity, secretly hoping, however, that the Colonel would think well of him.

"Oh! I rather like him than otherwise. He is quite a man of the world, evidently, and good company too, I dare say. I shouldn't wonder if Wytham's suspicions were true, and that all this apparent eccentricity might be explained merely as want of money."

"Do you think, then, papa, that he has really been a gambler," she asked in a very anxious tone, which the Colonel did not notice.

"I dare say he has, and yet there are no traces of dissipation about him. He is a fine man certainly—a handsome face. Curious that he should have been in the —th."

Evelyn said nothing, for Arthur was a subject on which she never dared to speak.

"I think," continued the Colonel, "that I shall ask him to dine with us, as soon as he has returned my call. It is hard to leave a man out on mere suspicion."

"And then you can find out, papa, if he really has been a gambler. I hope it is not true, dear papa."

"So do I with all my heart, Lyn; but even if it is, it will be hard upon him to exclude him from all society, if he has come down here to break the habit."

"I'm sure he must be trying to be good, papa, or he wouldn't do all what Mr. Thornton was telling you."

And so these two thoroughly simple-minded people discussed the stranger for the rest of their walk home; and such is man's denseness with regard to women, that the father never dreamt for a moment that the daughter felt anything but the commonest curiosity about the new comer.

Nevertheless little Evelyn began to feel from that day a very different interest in life. She had not the remotest suspicion that she was in love, and would quite sincerely have denied the imputation of being so, but she knew

nothing about it. Her thoughts, as I have said, were not capable of much variety, and when she liked anything, she was never tired of turning them to it again and again. The fact, therefore, that for two or three days she pondered over the conversation at the Rectory must be taken as proof that she liked Mr. Preston, and the fact that she pondered thereon exclusively, that she did not feel the same affection now for any of her old nick-nacks—that she preferred, for instance, the bit of stone labelled “from the Wynch,” to the dried flowers from Longmoor—that she neglected Muff, Boa, Tippet, and on the following Sunday could not manage to read more than three lines of “Miriam Fielding”—that in short a complete change took place in all her associations, in the contemplation of which she passed so many hours, must be taken as proof that she not only liked Mr. Preston, but liked him very much.

Then as she sat at the window of that little

room, balancing so uncomfortably on that rickety chair, working very neatly at that eternal strip of embroidery, she used to put such questions to herself as these :

“I wonder why he thinks I am romantic?”

Answer: “Perhaps he didn’t think at all about it.”

“I wonder if he loves Wolf better than anybody else?” Answer: “Perhaps he loves somebody who does not love him.” Deduction: “She must be a very cold person not to love him.”

“I wonder why he calls in such odd clothes?”

Answer: “Perhaps he is too poor to afford any more.”

“I wonder why he lives in such a strange manner?” Answer: “Perhaps he is very, very poor.” Deduction. A sigh and a wish that she had “money” to send him, which desire, her funds being about fifteen pence at this period, she is unable to satisfy.

“I wonder if he will call to-morrow?” An-

swer: “I wish he would.”

"I wonder if papa will like him?" Answer :
"I am sure I shall."

And these "wonders" were repeated daily, and as each to-morrow arrived, the wonder about his calling was expressed aloud to the Colonel or Margaret, and the latter began to wonder, on her part, whether "my own little Eve had not taken a fancy to this doubtful stranger." Still Mr. Preston did not call. On the Sunday when Mr. Wytham heard all the account of their interview, he first asked Miss Margaret what she thought of him now; and Miss Margaret, having her own game to play, and having replied that she thought better of him than ever, and that he must be a gentleman, or he could not condescend to go among gipsies, and he must be a good man, because he went so much among the poor, ("Oh, I am *sure* he is good, Meg dear," rather excitedly from Evelyn), and he must be steady because he drank nothing but water, and he must be clever because he wrote, ("On fools-

cap," from Mr. Wytham). Mr. Wytham thereupon being—as men are wont to be—much vexed at hearing another man praised, said that as he knew his regiment now, he could soon find out all about him; but he thought the Colonel would do well to be cautious, at least to wait till he, Mr. Wytham, went to town and made his inquiries.

Meanwhile Mr. Preston did not call, and was just as distant as ever. From time to time the girls met him in his walks, but he never did more than bow to Evelyn. Now and then, too, they would see him come out of a cottage, and when a little way from it, pull out a book and a pencil, and write some notes.

"Oh! *I* know what he is," cried Margaret, hereupon with great contempt, "he is one of those men who make up the census, or at any rate he is connected with the Police, for he was taking notes at Launceston."

"Do you think he is, Meg dear?" asked

Evelyn, quietly. It would have made not the slightest difference to her whether he was a prince in disguise or a retired pot-boy.

A fortnight passed and Mr. Preston did not call.

One day, however, as Evelyn was going out by the back of the house, she was surprised to see him standing opposite the doorway of the little deserted chapel that I have described, examining it carefully. He caught sight of her as she passed, and came towards her, much to her confusion.

"Can you tell me anything of the history of this chapel, Miss Mordaunt?"

Evelyn was no archæologist, and knew nothing about it.

"I believe it is an old Saxon chapel," she said.

"Saxon—that is, Norman. Without a doubt Norman. This round arch and these mouldings are purely Norman. Do you take any interest in architecture?"

"I dare say I should if I knew anything about it."

"It is curious to see how completely ecclesiastical architecture of that day was symbolical. You see the hood of this arch, for instance. It is a rough representation of a serpent. Do you see? Here is the head."

"How curious. I never noticed it before."

He smiled kindly and went on,

"Everything on the outside of the church was destined to remind us of sin; everything inside was, on the contrary, to recall heaven. Those old Normans were thoroughly literal. Sin, they said, was outside the Spiritual Church, so they would put it outside the actual building. This serpent over the entrance was, of course, meant to represent the Serpent of Eden. Then the gurgoyles, you know—"

"What are the gurgoyles, if you please?"

"There is one on the belfry; they serve as water-spouts, very much prettier than our leaden things. Well, these gurgoyles, as you

have probably noticed, always represent some hideous animal or demon, something foul and disgusting ; but the corbel-heads inside the church are always of angels, saints, or pious monarchs. What is this chapel used as, Miss Mordaunt ?”

“The farmer who has papa’s land uses it as a barn.”

“Ah ! what a pity. I never can bear to see a church desecrated. I always think that the house which was built for God to meet us in, is hallowed by the prayers that have been offered up in it. I don’t care in what religion, but wherever the one true God has been worshipped, I think man ought to honour the spot. It may be all very well for the Chinese to turn their joss-houses into inns ; but in a Christian country to find a church turned into a barn seems very horrid ; don’t you think so ?”

“I am sure it is not papa’s fault,” said Evelyn, apologetically.

"No, no. But I am keeping you. You are going up the hill to read your book. May I ask what book it is?"

Evelyn coloured deeply at so much interest being taken in anything she did.

"Oh! it is only a novel," she said hurriedly. "But I shall not read it, that is, only if I get tired of thinking."

"Then you go up the hill to think? You are a philosopher, Miss Mordaunt. You have already discovered that to think well one must be removed from one's kind. There is nothing like a mountain for deep thought; it seems to provoke and induce it. None but the veriest cockney, or some boy from Oxford, could gaze at the sunrise from the Righi, for instance, and not feel the fulness of the spirit upon him. If he had never thought before, if he had never felt the beauty of God's handiwork, never risen from the common-placeness of life to contemplate Nature and Eternity and the mystery of existence, he would do so then. And then

there is such a grandeur in mountain-thoughts ; they take such a high tone, they fly from such lofty ground. The mind seems to gain height from the hill itself. How differently we think, for instance, of cities and city-life when we are down in them and when we are up above them ! How much bolder and nobler are our conceptions of life from the brow of the hill than they are on the crowded pavement. But I am keeping you from your walk. Good-bye."

He put out his hand, and she timidly placed hers in it. It was the first time he had shaken hands with her, and she felt a strange thrill pass through her. She had reason to say she should not read much of her novel ; she did not read a word of it. He had given her her first lesson, her first discourse. Years after she remembered this, and recalled how much she owed to Preston's stronger mind. And yet poor little Evelyn on the hill does not think so much of what

he said as of him. She soon forgets all about Norman architecture, but she remembers him pointing to the arch. She scarce understands what he meant about mountains, but she well remembers the richness of his voice, how enthusiastically he spoke, and the interest he showed in her. And then after sitting a long time alone, thinking of this last little adventure, she positively never suspected she was in love with him. When she came down the hill, she met Margaret in the garden.

"You've missed something, Madame," said Margery; "you'll be mad when you hear of it. Who do you think has been here?"

"Mr. Preston?"

"Of course. What a little silly you were not to stay at home."

"Was he nice?"

"Oh yes, well enough; but I didn't see anything wonderful about him; he talked just like anybody else."

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE, what Preston thought about it, may be guessed from a letter which he sent about a week later to his friend.

“ You were right, my dear Cunliffe, in your prophecies about me, to a certain extent. True, I cannot yet tell how far asceticism has laid me open to temptation, for the quiet borough of L—— scarcely offers any; but it is undeniable that I *have* broken through my hermit habits a little. Not dangerously so, however. The Rector of this place called on me, and I had the misfortune to be at home and let him in. This acquaintance, however, might

serve me, and I took a number of not quite worthless notes from my conversation with him. He is the exact common type of a country Rector, too, so that he presents no bad study. But though the other worthies have avoided me, a certain Colonel Mordaunt has likewise unearthed me, and what is more he has caught his badger. You remember Arthur Mordaunt of ours, in the days of our youth—a good-hearted fellow, over head and ears in debt, who left the regiment after about a year in it? Well, the cheery old boy is his father. The young reprobate is in that healthy purgatory—Australia, and I dare say ten times as happy washing and counting his sheep, as he used to be rattling the dice and popping champagne over them. There are a couple of pretty daughters, too. Excellent country girls with good hearts and sound characters, but ‘nothing in them;’ not an idea, not even the power of comprehension. The elder is the smarter of the two—I can’t say cleverer, be-

cause neither are clever—but there is an interesting quiet about the younger one, as if she was worth fathoming. I can't afford the time for it, and you may be sure that I shall do my best to avoid them. Sometimes, though, I fancy that they are worth the study, as an illustration of my theory of country education. It is the old story of heart and head. You can't have both. Towns cultivate the one, but ruin the other. These girls are at least very favourable specimens of rural simplicity. There is no more pretence or attempt about them than if they had gone through life like you and I, and came out at the other end.

“Now as to my work. I have written at length to Hibberd about it, so need not say much. I believe that I have done everything in connection with European confederation, and have sent in my report. In two words, my opinion is that, except with Prussia, it would not be an impossibility. Russia of course would be the great opponent, but I sincerely believe

that there is no other European state in the present day which has not discovered the uselessness of aggrandisement—not even Austria. On the questions of a federal army and permanent congress I have fully reported. After a full examination of the history of all united states from those of Greece downwards, I am convinced that a federal army cannot properly coexist with separate establishments. I have therefore reported in favour of the plan of the states of Holland in the seventeenth century and those of America in the present day—a standing federal army with a proportionate militia in each State. Of course the armament would require the army to be on a very much larger scale than that of America. The question of a permanent Diet is very much more intricate, and cost me a very great deal of thought besides all the reading necessary. I have found nothing in all the whole history of the world on which I could report favourably as a guide. The German Diet has been a failure. Modern European

congresses are nearer to the mark, but they are generally both the result of diplomacy and the lists for diplomats. I wish to exclude both the elective system and the "agenting" of diplomacy. I have reported in favour of foreign ministers being permanent and sole members, with of course a proportionate distribution of votes; which is another most difficult question. However, Hibberd has my report in full, and as I told him, I was very glad to get it off my hands. I do not think we ought to waste our time in the contemplation of utopia, nor is it of any use to take a field so far beyond our compass. Neither money, wisdom nor labour would give weight to our voice with the southern and eastern states of Europe, whatever we might do in the north and west. They are not ready for model institutions. What we may do with wisdom, money and influence lies in the narrower circle of our own shores, nay, under our eyes, at our doors, and I am now going to take up a more useful theme in the

shape of representation. I want books though. I want as many possible constitutional histories of mixed representations. I find the labour of looking through volumes of newspapers is immense, and in some respects unprofitable. For every little hint that you get here and there and would not find in condensed works, there is a mass of falsehood, especially in foreign newspapers, through which it is difficult sometimes to penetrate. I made some amusing notes at the L—— election. I wish I had time to dish them up into a squib; but they will all do very well to illustrate my report on the moral effect of extended suffrage. I have also been making notes on the condition of the rural populace, and parochial matters, which may perhaps be useful to you. Some of them I shall keep for my report on the establishment. I am amused but disgusted at your account of the manufacturing population. As for cant, we have little of it here—but to make up for it, we have formality.

“As you ask about my personal trial, I have great pleasure in telling you of its success. It was very hard at first, I admit, and I thought my health would break down under it ; but I was never so happy as I am now. What tired me most at first was the complete solitude and silence. I was afraid that my mind would lose vigour for want of conversation ; but while it is certainly more concentrated than before, and less universal, I do not think it has lost in reasoning power. In my walks, especially, I conduct everything by argument, imagining that it is you or Hibberd who give the answers, and I even frame them somewhat after your tone.

“Have you heard anything of Rumford? I fell in with some Romany the other day—Stanleys too—and tried to find out whether he had been among them, but in vain. His report will be one of the most amusing.

“In about a month I shall go to town for a short time to look up some things at the

State Paper Office and the Museum, and to confer with Hibberd. Shall you be there? It might be advisable. I often laugh when I think of you and me this time last year chez La Manetta, and contrast what we are now with what we were then.

“ Ever yours,

“ DENIS PRESTON.”

On the Sunday, the Colonel, as he had all along intended, asked Mr. Preston to join them in their quiet dinner.

“ But I am quite a hermit,” said Preston ; “ and live on grass and water, Miss Mordaunt. I should spoil your appetite, and your good dinner will make me discontented with my own cookery.”

“ No fear of that,” replied the Colonel ; “ you will get nothing but roast beef and a potato. You must come ; we are all alone ; that is — ”

“ But I dine at the rural hour of one.”

“ My good Sir, I don’t ask you to dine, but for the pleasure of your company.”

Evelyn, who was standing on the other side of her father, was staring all the while at Preston with her big saucer-eyes, and seemed to beg him to come. The anchorite happened to look up at her while he still hesitated, and the saucer-eyes decided the question. He certainly was rather sick of solitude and abstract theories, and longed for a little nature and a pretty face to look at. So he came, thinking to himself, “ this is worse and worse. What would Cunliffe say now ? ”

In this prejudiced country it is very trying for a stranger to sit down to dinner with four inhabitants of the same country place. Of course you cannot join in their local gossip, and ten chances to one you know nothing about crops and cattle. Then there are so many subjects which you must avoid. Politics, unless you are a rank Conservative, are very tender ground, and religion still more so ; of London society they

know little or nothing, and of their world you know still less. Books are all very well ; but people like Mr. Wytham read little, and think less of what they do read.

On that occasion, moreover, Mr. Wytham looked more grey than ever, and was by no means pleased to find himself introduced to Preston. Then, too, he was rather jealous of a younger and handsomer man, who of course would pay attention to Miss Margaret ; for Evelyn was too much a child and too stupid for a flirtation. So he rolled his grey little head in his large collars, buttoned and unbuttoned his frock coat repeatedly, and made up his mind to pooh-pooh everything that the new comer might say.

Preston would gladly have listened to the conversation of the others, and perhaps have taken notes of it afterwards, for it was a long time since he had had any country society of a quiet, domestic kind—so different to the London-out-of-town of great houses ; but he

soon found there was a shyness about the rest of the party, and as a man of the world, felt called upon to talk. The only difficulty was to light on a harmless theme. Of course the papers led the way.

"Did you see the last new bit of tyranny the Emperor has been indulging in. I mean about the newspapers?"

"Yes; I wonder the French people stand it," said the Colonel.

"Oh! the French, the French will stand anything," Mr. Wytham put in testily; "and as for tyranny, it serves them quite right; it is the best thing for them."

"Yet they are scarcely a patient people under it," said Preston quietly. "They did not stand the tyranny of the old *régime*, nor the humbug of the new; they did not stand the corruption of Louis Philippe, and if the present Emperor did not give them the excitement of a little war now and then, they would soon throw off his iron yoke."

“And what can one care for a people who are never contented without bloodshed or revolution?” cried Mr. Wytham.

“You do them some injustice there, my dear sir; they had nearly twenty years’ perfect calm under Louis Philippe, as long as they were well treated. But I agree with you that the French need excitement of some kind. They have the Celtic energy of the Irish, and the southern nervousness of the Italians, but with this important difference: they take larger, grander views than either. They never descend to the cowardice of the stiletto or pistol-shot from behind a hedge. What horrors they do, they do as a nation, as part of a system. They rise *en masse*, and they fall *en masse*.”

“Then I suppose it is a part of their system to submit to the degradation they are now suffering?” said Mr. Wytham with a sneer.

“Quite so. You must remember that the French are not really a political people. They have no opinions. Their party spirit is not

a matter of conviction but of education. Every Frenchman of a certain class is a Legitimist, every Frenchman of another a Red Republican. These are the only two parties who feel strongly. Those between them are purely guided by interest, and this is as much displayed in adhering to the present government as it was in that of Louis Philippe. Well, when there is no opening for either of these two parties, interest can govern the country quietly. All they want is plenty of excitement, and this the Empereur has the sense to give them."

"A despicable lot that can't be happy without fêtes and flummery," said Mr. Wytham, "just look at the thousands that are squandered on their public festivities."

"But that is all a part of their national character. They like to enjoy life. They can work, and they can suffer when there is any necessity to do so, but they like some merri-

ment after it. They remind me in this respect of the gipsies."

"Oh, do tell us something about them," cried Evelyn, who had been staring at Mr. Preston all the time without at all understanding the conversation.

"Ah, you have some knowledge of gipsies, I think?" said the Colonel.

"A set of vagabonds I should like to see exterminated," said Mr. Wytham.

"Don't abuse them," Margaret put in; "I am particularly partial to them. I once had my fortune told, and I was to marry a man younger than myself."

"What do you say to that, Wytham?" asked the Colonel laughing.

"I suppose you gave the woman an extra shilling for the announcement, Miss Margaret?" said Wytham, recovering his spirits.

"I have a friend who could tell you much more about them," Preston continued. "He has undertaken to wander among the vagabonds

of England, the gipsies, and tinkers, and knife-grinders, tramps, pedlars and foot-pads."

"More romantic than agreeable," suggested Margaret.

"Distributing testaments, I suppose, like that fellow Borrow," said Wytham.

"No, he is only picking up information, like the rest of us."

"The rest of you?"

"I mean like everybody else who has any object in life. He goes about, Miss Mordaunt, with a knife-grinding machine, wears his hair in ringlets—it is very black, and is just like a gipsy."

"Humph, I don't envy him," said Wytham.

"Oh, I should so like to know him," cried Evelyn.

"I will introduce him some day, then."

"What is his name?" asked the Colonel.

"Rumford, a man of good family, &c., everything that can be desired."

"Really," said Mr. Wytham, "young men of the present day are very ridiculous, always some fresh absurdity on hand. Don't you think so, Miss Margaret?"

Thereupon the pack was cast right and left. Mr. Wytham taunted Miss Margaret, and Preston engaged the Colonel. Evelyn who had no real place to fill there, listened intently to Preston, and stared at him more than ever.

Preston, however, made a pretty good dinner, but in spite of all pressing, drank nothing but water. When the girls were gone, he talked pleasantly enough about town and the clubs, on which subjects Mr. Wytham was rather more at home. Nevertheless, as he was a man guided by first impressions, Wytham determined to dislike the new comer, and did so. Margery and Eve retreated as usual to the drawing-room, and secured their Sunday books.

"My dear, what do you think of Mr. Preston?"

"I don't dislike him, Eve; he is passably clever, though I think he talks too much; but as for being eccentric, I am sure it is all put on for something or other."

Eve having to reflect on this proposition, took her book without replying to the window. Presently she felt a hand under her chin, and Margery turned her sister's face up towards her, and looked down on her affectionately.

"I expect my little Eve has taken it into her head to like this stranger a great deal," she said quietly.

"I—no, my dear; loose me, do." All the same, she blushed up to the temples.

"Confess it, silly thing."

"I like him, of course; so do you, so does papa. Why should not I say you liked him very much yourself?"

Margery looked as if she wanted to say a great deal more, but she contented herself with saying with a laugh, "Why, child, he is old enough to be your father. Don't be silly, and go thinking about him, Eve."

"I'm sure I never do," exclaimed Eve indignantly, therein most egregiously perjuring herself, and Margery went away laughing, more than ever persuaded that Eve did "think about" the new comer, and rather vexed that she had said anything about him to her.

Eve sat alone in the drawing-room window, looking across the lawn and the lake upon the well-known hill opposite, on which the evening purple was now settling. She had her book before her, but her mind was wholly occupied with what Margery had been saying. She did not notice any movement in the room, until looking round by chance, she found Mr. Preston's black beard over her shoulder, and incontinently uttered and checked a little scream of surprise.

"May I ask what you are reading?" he said, very gently.

"Oh, it is 'Miriam Fielding.'"

"A novel?"

"Oh no, we never read novels on Sunday. It is a tale."

“What is the difference?”

Evelyn got very confused, and felt inclined to run away. She doubted her power of sustaining a *tête-à-tête* with the hermit.

“I don’t know,” she faltered; “at least I know there is a great deal of difference, because papa would not allow us to read it if it was the same.”

Preston smiled at her simplicity, and took up the book in question.

“You are a happy being to walk by faith, Miss Mordaunt; I wish I could. I suppose then the difference lies in the number of volumes, for this looks to me very like a religious novel.”

Evelyn made no answer, and he went on.

“Is that an elder sister of yours or younger?”

“Oh, she is three years older than I am.”

“I thought so. What do you call her?”

“Her name is Margaret, but I always call her Meg.”

"And which of you is considered the beauty of the family?"

"Oh, we are neither of us beautiful, but Meg is always considered very pretty. Don't you think she is so?"

"You are a most excellent young lady," laughed Preston; "your answers would delight the most prudish of schoolmistresses."

Evelyn not at all understanding him, answered indignantly,

"I'm sure she is very pretty; everybody says so."

"Who is everybody, for instance?"

Evelyn again confused, "Mr. Wytham. He is one of our oldest friends," she added, with as much severity as she was capable of.

"Then he has a right to be a little abrupt at your table. I can't say that I take to him. He is prejudiced, and if there is one thing I hate particularly, it is prejudice."

"I don't think he meant anything," pleaded Evelyn, who had always the vastest respect for Mr. Wytham. "He is often like that."

"*Tant pis*, the less one has of a nuisance the better. But where is your sister gone to?"

"Into the garden, I think."

"Shall we go and join her?"

Now, the interpretation which Evelyn put on this conversation, was, that Mr. Preston liked her sister particularly. When they were out in the garden, as if to confirm this, he went on more seriously :

"Your sister reminds me very much of your poor brother—he was rather a friend of mine."

Evelyn said nothing, but walked on, looking down. Both were silent for a few moments, when Eve timidly raised her face towards Preston, and turning her large eyes with a pleading look, which was really very fascinating, said :

"If you please, Mr. Preston, I want to ask you a favour."

"You mean to confer one by asking it," said he, gallantly.

"I think you will do it, because I know you are good-natured." She blushed a little,

saying this, and looked down again: "Papa is going to talk to you about Arthur, and would you please, Mr. Preston, say something not very bad about him, because it will vex papa so much if you do. You needn't say anything untrue, you know, but if you did know anything kind to say of him, it would so please papa. This is the only thing that ever makes him unhappy. Will you, please?"

"Is that your favour? And can you suspect me of saying anything to a father against his dead son, *De mortuis nil*—"

"But he is not dead. He is in Australia."

"O-o-h! At the diggings."

"No, he keeps sheep."

Preston could not help laughing outright.

"I beg your pardon, but the idea of Arthur Mordaunt doing the bucolic is too good. I used to like your brother very much, though I didn't know much of him."

"Oh! we all liked him and loved him so much, till he behaved so to papa. But here is Meggie, and you mustn't say anything about it to her."

Margery was sitting in her usual place in a shady corner of the water, where an old punt was moored. The moment Preston saw it, he jumped into it.

"Glorious Apollo, Miss Mordaunt, where is the punt-hook? I have not punted since I was at Eton."

"For shame, it is Sunday."

"Oh! *mille pardons*, but really it is so delightful to be reminded of one's school-days, when one was only on the threshold of the Temple of Sin and used to peep so longingly into its forbidden arena."

"Have you entered it, then, since that time?" asked Margery.

"And worshipped there, I fear. I should shock you if I told you a tithe of the wicked things I have done in my life-time. In fact I should shock myself now, for I have outlived them."

"I can't imagine why men are so much worse than women."

"But are they after all? For my part, Miss

Mordaunt, I fancy one's sins ought to be measured by the amount of temptation. Now ladies having no temptation to drink or gamble—"

Margaret and Evelyn exchanged a meaning glance.

"Can't be praised for abstaining from those iniquities. But if they are tempted to lose their temper, and say cross things to one another and fall into tantrums, I am inclined to think that they are as much to blame as we unfortunate wretches who have so many temptations."

"But a great many men do not do these horrid things."

"Because they are not placed in a position to be tempted. But look at a young man who goes into the army, down to some miserable dépôt, where for two-thirds of the day he has nothing on earth to do. He finds his brother officers making themselves cheerful countenances, producing the cards and dice, varied only by the betting book. He has no education

to speak of, no real occupation, no interest ; nothing but a lazy life of pleasure to look forward to, except in active service, which is a rare opportunity, and what on earth is he to do ? It's all very well when you're at a lively station and can flirt or fall in love, but ten chances to one a man on joining is sent to some wretched little garrison town, where there is scarcely a lady in the place, and often enough not a library with a newer book in it than Scott's novels and Pickwick."

Margery did not seem to relish the subject. Perhaps it reminded her of Arthur, and fortunately at this moment the Colonel and Wytham strolled up to them, the latter very jealous at seeing the lively manner in which Preston was engaged with Miss Margaret.

The Colonel then took Preston away with him, and walking up and down the terrace delicately questioned him about his lost boy, and at last poured out his whole heart to him. Preston was touched, and soothed him as well as he could, and the Colonel felt happy

in being able to speak on this long tabooed subject.

In short when ten o'clock came, Preston, walking home across the hills, confessed that he had passed a sensible quiet evening and liked the whole family very well. Wytham was grumpy and wrath with them all for encouraging the stranger; the Colonel determined to cultivate him, and little Evelyn expressed her happiness in her diary after this fashion :

“*Sunday.* A very fine pleasant day. Went to church service. Mr. Wytham and Mr. Preston dined with us. Mr. Preston was very nice.”

But Margaret thought very differently : “ I don’t half like this Mr. Preston. I am certain he has been a bad man, and does not appear to be ashamed of it. I trust little Eve won’t get interested in him. I wish he would flirt with me and leave her alone—for I am fire-proof. I think I shall make him do so.”

But whatever Margery’s resolutions, they received a check in the total disappearance of

Mr. Preston. Not only he did not call, but Evelyn, who walked nowhere now but on the hill, never met him there. The next Sunday she should see him though, and so she waited patiently till then. He was not at the morning service. While they were at lunch it set in with steady rain. The Colonel and Margaret would not go to the afternoon service; but Eve's "religion" would not allow her to miss it. She had certainly not been so religiously disposed on a wet Sunday for a long time. Alas! for piety unrewarded, Mr. Preston was not there. Poor little Eve put the day down in her diary as "very wet and nasty."

The next week the Colonel, who had taken warmly to the tenant of the Wynch, determined to call on him, went up, knocked loudly at the door, but in vain; and returned with the conviction that Mr. Preston was gone away. Another Sunday passed without their seeing him; and then all agreed that he must be gone, and that it was rather rude not to have called first, and that in short he was a most eccentric

individual. They had just come to this conclusion, when one day Margaret and Evelyn walking down the village met him. He was leaning on a thick stick, his face white and sunken, and his whole appearance that of a convalescent.

"Well, Mr. Preston," said Margery. "We thought you were gone for ever. I imagined it was part of your plan to come like a thunderstorm and vanish for ever. You have been away, I suppose."

Preston smiled.

"Away from myself, not from the Wynch. Heaven knows where I have been; perhaps Wolf can tell you. He has watched me and nursed me these last ten days, and even forgotten his dinner."

"Oh! have you really been ill!" exclaimed Evelyn, and immediately after went among the red roses, quite frightened at having betrayed so much feeling.

"I suppose so, Miss Mordaunt. A few days after I left you I fell down one evening in a fit

of giddiness, and since then I have been in bed, which, as I hate bed, is a terrible penance. I got up yesterday with a very strong appetite, and to-day I have hobbled over to L—— to see a doctor. When I look at that hill before me," pointing with his stick, "and remember that I must go up it only to go to bed again, I begin to believe that I have been ill."

"And had you no one to take care of you?" asked Eve anxiously.

Preston smiled faintly.

"My worthy *putz-frau*—*saprelote*, what is it—charwoman came as usual, but couldn't get in; and Wolf has not found out yet how to open the door. Somebody else came, I believe, and excited Wolf terribly."

"That must have been papa," said Eve.

"Yes; he called to see if you were gone or not."

"I have been nearly gone; but it is my own fault; too much work, low diet, and—and something in the house, too, I think. I could

have borne it well if you good Samaritans had not given me a taste of civilized life to make me feel wretched. The worst is that Galen insists that I must give up work for a time."

"You look very ill, Mr. Preston," said Margaret. "I'm sure you can never mount that hill. You had much better come and rest at Marfield."

Preston looked from one to the other with a quaint smile.

"Good Samaritans again," he said. "But shan't I bore you? A hermit must be bad company enough, but a sick hermit must be unbearable."

"Oh! no. You amuse papa, and we shall be glad of the change. You know we lead such very quiet lives."

"Change! ha, ha! Think of me, who am utterly sick of myself, being change to any one."

"You have had too much solitude lately," said Margery as they walked on. "Man, you know, was not made to live alone."

"Nor woman either for that matter. But upon my word, Miss Mordaunt, you have made me an offer."

"Then you had better accept it," said Margery, pertly.

"With all my heart; but I think you'll repent-it."

"I think I should."

"Thank you; now we are on good terms; we understand one another. But what do you say, Miss—Miss Eve or Miss Lyn—I really don't know your name; for Colonel Mordaunt calls you the one, and Miss Mordaunt the other."

"Oh, you must not flirt with Evelyn, Mr. Preston; she might take it seriously."

Meantime Eve was blushing up to the roots of her bright hair; and not understanding the joke quite—thought that Margaret and Mr. Preston were getting on very well together, and contemplated dropping behind. Poor little Evelyn!

"But without making you an offer, Mr.

Preston, why do you live in such complete seclusion?"

"What if I have been reading the lives of the saints and become enamoured of asceticism? Or what do you say about being more alone in a crowd than at the Wynch? Or what do you say if, finding the world, the flesh, and the ———"

"For shame."

"If finding them too strong for me, I have sought refuge, like St. Kevin, in solitary nooks—heigh ho! it's quite useless, there's always a Kathleen somewhere about."

At which Margaret looked shocked, and Evelyn thought it was her duty to do so too.

"But seriously, Miss Mordaunt, since you will not let me joke, I have come down here for two very simple purposes. Instead of going to a water-cure or a mad-house, I thought I would try if I could not manage my own mind and body after my own fashion. Escape from the world, *id est*, London, Paris, &c., take

to early hours, simple diet and water drinking, and make myself generally a decent member—not perhaps of society, but at least of Christendom. Then in the next place I came to study.”

“Study what?”

“Of course you can guess; ‘the proper study of mankind is—’ what? In truth I came to study the History of England.”

“Mrs. Markham?” whereat Evelyn laughed.

“Dear Mrs. Markham,” said he, “how I used to love her comfortable downright views of our forefathers and their villanies. I wish I had anything so agreeable to study; but, alas, I am plunged in blue-books, constitutional histories, pamphlets, speeches, and heaven knows what all.”

“Then you are writing a History of England. I thought you were an author.”

“Oh, are you?” ejaculated Evelyn.

“No, Miss Evelyn, nothing so romantic or interesting. I am only a student. The fact is, Miss Mordaunt, if you must know,

that I and my friends find that for these last thirty years or so of our existence, we have been quite useless, and not perhaps very ornamental, and so we made up our minds to be of use. The world, we found, was all awry, somehow, and England rather more awry than the rest of it. So we are going to put it all straight; isn't it kind of us? and so one of us is gone round the country among one class, and another among another; and here am I come down to study the History of England, and see if we can't make her a rather more respectable old lady than she is."

"Very condescending; but suppose England declines?"

"Ah! you see that besides our brains, we have got money, and influence, and great men amongst us; and while the small men like myself do all the wisdom, the great ones will do all the agitation. Nothing like agitation, Miss Mordaunt; look at the Corn Law League. Can do anything with agitation. So now you've got my confession; and, thank heaven,

here we are at your house, for I feel quite done up."

He leaned against the porch quite exhausted. Margery went in like an anxious Martha to make certain arrangements for tea, and Evelyn hesitated between the propriety of following her, and the duty, (not pleasure of course), of staying with the guest. She decided in favour of the latter, and as he leaned there, looking up at the evening clouds, without speaking, she at last ventured to ask,

"Is all that quite true, Mr. Preston, what you were telling Meg?"

"Truth in jest," he answered solemnly, still looking at the sky. "Truth in jest, I assure you. I don't know though if one ought to jest about souls, they are scarce jesting matters; nor our work either. Do you see that one little star up yonder at the edge of the cloud. How dimly it trembles at finding itself alone, and seems to doubt if its light will be acceptable. Ah! now the cloud is gone over it; it will pass though, but when it has

passed there will be first a hundred, then a thousand, then a million stars a-shining, and it will be scarcely noticed in the brilliancy of the rest. Who will care to remember that it was the first to shine? Well," he continued manfully, "a good man who seeks to improve a bad age is very much like yonder star. He trembles at his loneliness, he doubts and lacks courage, then soon comes the cloud, as it has come over me, scarce three months at my work, and already broken down; and ere long the field will be full, and my little light lost. Yet if I sincerely love the work, I should not repine at that; the more workmen the better. What do you think of it?"

With these last words he turned full upon her suddenly, and found that her eyes were fixed upon him; they had been so all the time, and now she was covered with confusion. His sad face relaxed into a smile of something like pity when he discovered her in this way, and saw her confusion.

"I—I don't know," she blurted out. "I

am not clever enough to understand these things ; you had better ask Meggie."

"Not clever enough? I shall find that out for myself, if you please. But if you speak the truth I can only envy you. Talent is a great responsibility, and we who want to love God with all our minds, and find those minds capable of great worldly achievements, of fame perhaps among men, but weak and poor for higher studies, are tempted often to love the world with all our minds. Believe me that the wealth of the brain is as great a snare as pocket wealth any day."

"Won't you come in and rest?" said Evelyn, not understanding much of all this. So they moved in.

From that day Preston became almost a daily visitor at the house, and generally stopped to tea. No longer able to work, he felt that he should go mad if he had not some society. The Colonel liked him immensely, Margaret found him very amusing, and as he talked to her more than to any one else she began to

believe that she was flirting with him ; for Margaret was just such a prude as makes an arrant flirt, and as for Evelyn, all the days were set down in her diary as "pleasant;" and Mr. Preston's name coming in almost every time, was generally followed by "he was very nice." Not that his spirits were always good ; at times he had fits of the deepest melancholy, for which he would not account, and then he used coolly to say that he had come down to be cheered up. At others he talked very wildly, and argued in favour of such impossibilities, that the Colonel used to say to his daughters :

"There's a fine reason thrown away, for want of moral perception."

But sometimes his spirits were ridiculously high, and he felt, as he confessed, quite a boy again. When, as often happened, he joined them in their walks, he would suddenly burst out singing, would parody well-known actors (whom they had never seen), dance ballets, recite poetry in melodramatic bombast, climb trees for the sake of one flower for Evelyn,

and in short do any absurd thing that suggested itself for the moment.

"I enjoy making a fool of myself," he used to say.

"Is there any necessity to make yourself one?" Margery would answer pertly; wherefore Evelyn would exclaim: "Oh, Meg, how can you be so rude?"

As for Evelyn, she became more and more convinced, that if Mr. Preston liked either of them particularly, it must be Meg, and she therefore resolved as a safe-guard to herself not to like him any more than she could help—a resolution, which like many a better one, she never carried out. Certainly, appearances favoured this supposition. When both the girls were present, it was Meggie to whom he talked, though every now and then he would attempt a little badinage with Evelyn, whom he christened "the silent woman," and who was too timid to keep it up with him. Nevertheless, when alone with Margery, he conversed on general subjects without the slightest approach

to flirtation, while, if left alone with Eve, he talked mostly of her, or of himself. He pitied the poor child, thought she was not enough encouraged, and did his best to draw her out. He was certain that she was shy rather than stupid, and her reserve interested him the more. And little Eve would follow him about with her eyes, and watch his face while he talked to the others, or received his banter with bewitching dignity. Then, too, seeing how Margaret succeeded, she would do her best to imitate her manner, but she was far too natural to succeed in any such art. And every evening when she went up to her little room, she would heave a long sigh, and say to herself: "I wish I was as clever as Meg." Ah! Miss Lyn, it was fortunate for you that no one came to your sanctum, for they would have found in the drawer, devoted to relics, most tell-tale scraps—flowers he had picked for you, notes he had written to the Colonel to accept, or decline invitations, and which, when possible, you rescued from the flames; yes, even that volume of

Shelley which you lent to him for a few days, was promoted on its return, and no longer stood by the side of "Miriam Fielding," and such like, but lay in the drawer among the relics—you know it did.

And then after all she had no idea that she was in love with this Mr. Preston. It would have been absurd, she thought, because he never could or would return it. Nobody ever would love her, she couldn't suppose such a thing possible; but especially not a man, who, papa said, was so very clever. Then she didn't know she was at all pretty; but none the less, when she heard Mr. Preston's voice, wherever she might be, she used to put her front hair neat, and smoothe out her dress, and walk slowly in the direction of the voice.

Meanwhile, the Colonel used to joke Margery, and Mr. Wytham grew more and more jealous, and more and more grey, or rather pale-green in complexion. He seemed to derive great consolation from buttoning and unbuttoning his frock-coat, rolling his little head in

the meantime, until the topmost buttonhole was worn quite white. He, moreover, redoubled his visits, which was precisely what Margaret wanted, and used repeatedly to say, as if by way of warning: "I shall be obliged to go to town next week, I think, Miss Margaret, and then I can make enquiries about your friend."

"Please do; he is so very mysterious and eccentric that I am really quite interested in him."

Which reply Wytham, who knew nothing of female tactics, felt to be a dagger in his heart. In short, I am certain he would have offered in a short time, if it had not been suddenly announced one day that Meggie was invited to stay for a month with the Palmers. At which news Mr. Wytham smiled, buttoned his coat up tight, and murmured to himself: "Better wait, then, till she comes back."

She went therefore in due time, not quite easy in her mind about Evelyn. The Colonel made Preston promise to come the next evening. "I shall be lonely without my child,"

he said. "Poor little Lyn is no companion, you know."

He went down to tea, therefore, and devoted himself the whole time to the Colonel, except when that old gentleman dosed over his newspaper, when Preston came and sat close to Evelyn, and talked to her in an under tone.

When at ten o'clock he was leaving the house, he thought he saw a man's figure glide from the nearest window. He took no notice of this, but when he was mounting the hill he heard a heavy footstep behind him; he grasped his stick and walked on faster, but the man gained on him and came up to him, then staring closely into Preston's face, muttered:

"I thought so," and passed on.

"I fancy I have seen that man once or twice," thought Preston, as he went along to his lonely home. How utterly lonely it was he now felt more than ever, and the contrast with the cheerful party at Marfield constantly pressed itself upon him. He sought refuge in work again, but he was not able to apply to

it as he had done before ; and when he stretched himself back in his "thinking-chair," it was too often to long for a soft hand placed in his, a soft voice to encourage him, a gentle loving wife to make his life less lonely.

"And why not?" he would murmur, "am I to quench all natural feeling, to freeze the warm heart within me, and turn myself into a mere thinking-machine? But no, the work must be done, and the work would suffer ; you, Wolf," (as the hound thrust his long nose under his arm), "you must take the wife's place for the present. You don't cost so much to feed, and you can't talk ; you don't wear silk dresses, and you can follow me when I want to wander ; you will never plague me with jealousy, nor twit me with neglect. Yes, Wolf, you're worth a dozen wives any day."

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CHAPTER VI.

HE was now constantly thrown together with Evelyn, and somehow began to watch her more; the timid child felt it and shrank away from him, and did her very best to conceal what she felt, and what she soon began to acknowledge did exist within her.

"It is very silly of me," she would often think, "he will never care for me, how should he? And as Meg told me before she went, he will only make a fool of me. I wish he would not come so often then—no, I don't wish that—but I must not be so foolish."

And then, when he came and was talking to the Colonel ("he never talks to me," she

thought, "when there is any one else to talk to, and I'm sure I could not answer him, if he did,") she would fix her large eyes on him intently, learning his face by heart, until suddenly he would turn round and find her out, and she would blush up to the forehead; then when they were by any chance alone, he talked so differently to her. He did not come upon politics, or the news out of the papers as he did with papa, nor did he talk wildly and strangely as with Margaret, but he would ask all about herself—how she passed her days, what she read, and so on; or even letting himself lower down, for he did not wear stilts though he was a philosopher, would appear quite interested about the dogs, or the farmer who rented the farm, and was always giving trouble some way or another, or even about the servants, which subjects were sufficiently within Evelyn's range, and sometimes he would even seem quite eager to learn about their governesses and their early life.

"You must have learnt a great deal from Miss Harding, then," he said.

"Meg did, a great deal, but I was so naughty and so stupid, that she didn't care to teach me."

"Naughty, how so? did you stick pins in her chair, hide her books, or draw portraits of her on the slate?"

"No, no, it was my temper, I mean."

"Temper, nonsense; you haven't got one."

"Oh, you don't know me yet, nobody does know me, nobody understands me."

"Are you so very profound, that no one can sound you. As deep as the Atlantic, I suppose."

"You know I didn't mean that," she answered pettishly. "Only I am so different really to what I seem to be."

"Oh! a practical actress, in fact—wearing a perpetual mask. That is very dreadful."

"How disagreeable you are. I shan't tell you what I mean," turning away.

"Oh! do, do. I won't say another word if you will. But I have taken it into my head

to take soundings of this mysterious ocean, and make the silent woman talk ; so you must tell me all about yourself."

" You don't want to know."

" Don't I ? hem. Well, you shall have your own way ; but allow me to assure the silent woman that I do want to know, particularly, all about her."

Wheron Eve blushed, and stole a look at him to see if he was serious or not ; and for the rest of the time did her best to talk to him, and rattled on about Miss Harding, and the all-important events of her life, without noticing the quaint smile on Preston's face. However, he was really amused ; he was always ready for a study of character, and that of this child was so simple, so trusting, and so genuine, that to the *blasé* man of the world it presented quite a novel picture.

I do not know how far this kind of thing might have gone, and how long it would have lasted. I think a long time ; for Eve was not skilful in flirtation. She said just what she

thought, and was utterly ignorant of feminine wiles. She was like her namesake before her interview with the serpent. In short, she could not, if she had dared even, have drawn Mr. Preston on; and certainly Preston would not fall in love without some encouragement, even if he could fall in love with this mere child at all. However, Evelyn's happiness, like all happiness, was short lived; and just as she began to doubt whether, after all, Mr. Preston had not some fancy for her, and to fear that it would all disappear, when Meg came back, just, in fact, as she was getting deeper and deeper in love with him—he, one evening, on shaking hands with the Colonel, said as quietly as possible:

“This is good-bye, Colonel, for I shall not see you for some time. I am going to town about some rather important business.”

As he said this, he cast a sudden glance at Evelyn, who was standing behind the Colonel's chair. She was very pale, and her eyes were fixed on him with an expression which I can

not describe. I only know that it showed signs of a struggle within her to repress the misery which had suddenly fallen on her. Preston remembered this look a long time.

"Is this a sudden resolve?" asked the Colonel really sorry, "or have you intended this move for some time?"

"Neither. I have intended for some time to go up to town to read in the Museum and elsewhere; but I had fixed no day for the move until I received a letter this morning which obliges me to go to-morrow."

"When will you be back?" asked Eve timidly, leaning forward a little. "But, perhaps, you don't mean to come back at all."

"Wrong for once. I assure you I shall return as soon as I possibly can. But now, good night and good-bye. I never take leave, Colonel, in the approved fashion. I like to come and go, like the villains in French novels, without a word. It may be impolite, but it is much more comfortable. We Englishmen are ashamed of our feelings, and like to show them as little as possible. Good night."

He took Evelyn's hand, and found it as cold as ice.

"You must make my adieux to Miss Mordaunt for me," said he, taking the opportunity to look at her face. She was staring at him dreamily, and asking herself if this was the last time she should ever look at him. He pressed her hand warmly; she felt that it was pressed more than usual, and timidly she dared to return the pressure; and then he was gone.

She heard the door close, and Wolf's bark of delight, and then, leaving the room, rushed up to the landing at the top of the stairs, and through the window strained her eyes to see him in the dark. She saw him pass along under the cedars, and then—yes, she was certain of it—she saw another figure, tall and slight, but not his. After all this was, perhaps, imagination. She thought so, at any rate, and ran off to her own little room. Here, quite in the dark, she threw herself into the rickety chair, and sobbed violently.

At last she was calm again.

"How foolish I am," she said to herself, drying her eyes, "it is Meg, after all, that he wants. His last words were about her. Oh me, oh me!"

Then she got up, washed her face, and went down to the drawing-room again. The Colonel had fallen asleep. She sat down, and seemed to foresee the lonely life she was now to lead. When the Colonel woke up, he saw her pale face, and yet he never for a moment imagined that his child had an interest in Mr. Preston.

On the following Sunday Mr. Wytham also announced his intention of going to town.

"Bless my soul, we shall be left quite alone," said the Colonel; "Margery has been asked to prolong her visit at the Palmers. I don't know what I shall do. Not a soul to speak to."

"There is Miss Evelyn."

The Colonel wrinkled his forehead and wagged his head. Little Eve well knew that

that meant to say, "she is nobody;" but she was accustomed to this, and it did not make her cry.

After dinner Mr. Wytham became somewhat confidential with the Colonel.

"I am glad that fellow Preston is gone," he said mysteriously, "I don't quite like him. When is he coming back?"

"This must be a prejudice of yours, my dear Wytham. He is an excellent man, a little eccentric, perhaps; but very clever, amusing, and when he chooses, very sensible."

"But you know nothing of him."

"Nothing more than that he was in—in—Arthur's regiment; a very good regiment, too."

"Ah, but why did he leave it?"

"How can I tell? I only judge from what I see; and I say, Wytham, that I like the man extremely."

"Well, he may be all right. I will say nothing till I hear more. But I do trust, Colonel, that if he returns before I do, you will

not let him be quite as intimate here as he has been, until you see me again. I only suggest this on your daughters' account. He is quite a man to ingratiate himself with young girls."

"Humph, I don't see that he has much to gain here, then ; but I will take your advice, Wytham, and wait till I see or hear something more of him."

And now in little Lyn's diary all the days, no matter how fine, are put down as "dull," and very dull indeed is her little life to her. She has no friends except the dogs. Maria Thornton is a very heavy uninteresting girl, who affects a great deal of amity for Eve, which never goes any further than professions ; but Maria Thornton is the only young lady in the village. The others of their acquaintance belong to the country, and are too far off for any friendship. To obviate this want, she devotes herself very regularly to the poor, and not knowing any better, allows them to gossip away to her. All passes in at one ear and goes out at the other with Evelyn, except now

and then, when she is told that "that funny gentleman at the Wynch came down here one day, Miss," and said or did so and so, left money or read to the old father, or politely hinted that their cottage might be cleaner; then indeed she pricks up her little ears, and goes home rather happier than before.

But now she does nothing but linger in her little room; the Colonel is dull, but he does not expect much enlivenment from Evelyn. Nevertheless, the Colonel and she approach to more familiarity than heretofore. He talks to her now, which he never used to do; talks, too, about Mr. Preston and Mr. Wytham, and also about Margaret, and in his blindness asks her candidly if she doesn't think Mr. Preston admires Margaret very much.

"I'm sure he does, papa," answers Eve with a gulp. "He is always so much more lively with Meg than with me—I mean with anybody else."

The Colonel wrinkles up his forehead and smiles.

"In spite of Wytham's suspicions, Lyn, I should not oppose an offer from Mr. Preston, but I don't know about Margaret. What do you say, Lyn?"

"I—I know she does not love him, papa, dear," (excitedly).

"Love, why no, it is rather premature for love; but she likes him, Lyn, eh, child? you girls always know each other's minds."

"I don't think she likes him very much, papa dear, not so much as—as to make—you know what I mean."

"Ha, ha, poor little Lyn; after all you are too young to know anything about it."

That may be, Colonel Mordaunt, but not too young to feel, and Lyn has found this out now for the first time. It is just because there is a shadow of a doubt in her mind, just because he has been so kind to her, shown her so much more attention than anybody else, young or old, ever did before, talked to her, and almost as it were taught her to talk, just because of that last pressure of the hand, that Evelyn

now feels so dull. If there had never been this doubt, I believe that in a short time she would have grown accustomed to look at the matter as an impossibility, and returning to her old monotony of life, and in time almost forgotten the stranger. But since Meg had left, there had risen up sundry sly like hopes in her mind, which helped to nurse the desires already there; and now poor Lyn really discovered that she was in love with this man, and really pined at the separation. Hers was not a nature to love lightly when once she had begun to do so. She was just one of those quiet girls who, when they once admit a passion, make it the whole end of their existence, cherish it in spite of all blows, and never, never let it go. And so poor Lyn has begun to love, and in her own heart she knows she can never alter now. And everything is changed in her life now: the old occupations, the old pleasures amuse no longer. She feels now a certain anxious throbbing which will not let her go on in the same quiet way as before. She draws closer to

her father, as if danger threatened her. She longs to tell her mind to somebody, but she dare not; the instinctive modesty within her bids her conceal it even from those nearest to her. Only when at night she goes to her own little room, and has locked the door, she can take out with care those miserable scraps which to her are such precious relics. Then she reads over her meagre diary, and with her wonderful memory for dates and facts, she can fill up each day in her mind with the proper ends, and on these she dwells with affection.

In the same way, she takes those walks which he took with her and Margaret, and once or twice she even ventures to go as far as the Wynch, and have a good look at it. It was on one of these occasions that James Stephens, who had seen her from a distance, and run stealthily up, frightened her by speaking to her.

“You’ve come a long way from home by yourself,” said he, too independent to add “Miss” to his speeches.

"Yes, Mr. Stephens," and she walked on. At this he stopped, and looked after her with a bitter expression. She, however, in the goodness of her heart, thinking her manner had been a little too abrupt, and might hurt the man's feelings, turned round and called out, "I hope your father is better, Mr. Stephens." Thereupon he came up to her.

"He's not much better, thank you; to say truth, he's very poorly. He'd take it very kindly if you'd come and see him one of these days. It's a long time since you or Miss Margaret's been our way."

"I'm very sorry, but as Margaret's away, I can't come, Mr. Stephens."

"You needn't be afraid to come alone, but maybe you don't like the trouble. Poor people, like us, isn't very good company."

Evelyn looked down at this speech and scarcely knew what to say. "I'll ask papa about it, Mr. Stephens."

"Ah, it wouldn't be much out of your way. I've seed you come up to the Wynch

once or twice, and that's farther than our bit of a place ; but then it's a *gentleman* lives there, and we're only poor folk."

He said this with such a coarse sneer, that poor little Eve's face became red all over, and she moved on muttering something about coming soon. But Jim had not gone so far to no purpose, and he coolly walked on with her.

"And a nice place it is for a gentleman to live in, full of dirt and varmin. If we was to live there, folk would say we wasn't respectable, but I suppose a gentleman can do what poor folk can't. It's—"

Evelyn was getting alarmed.

"I must go home now, Mr. Stephens, good bye," she said, turning sharp round, and she had no sooner done so, than she set off at a sharp run with the three dogs after her, and didn't stop till she was out of sight of her persecutor.

"She's as proud as the rest of 'em," growled Jim.

After this Evelyn did not venture near the Wynch for another fortnight, and then she could stand out no longer, for she was very lonely, and she felt a certain companionship about the old tumble-down house. This time, however, she took care to see that the field was clear, and arrived at her destination in safety.

Now though she had often walked round the house and looked it well over, Evelyn had never dared to go farther than to peep in at the windows. On this occasion, however, her curiosity was too strong for her, and she went close up to the house and tried to reach one of the windows; failing in this, she went round to the back. There was here a small garden, which I think I described, with a small high gate, which she now found open. Being in high spirits, she resolved to follow Muff who had already run in to inspect the premises, and she walked in somewhat timidly. As there was nothing but weeds, and a broken down bench to be seen here, she walked up to the back door of the house. "I wonder if it is open," she

said to herself. She put her little hand on the handle, and was going to turn it, when it turned of itself, and before she knew whether she was frightened or not, the door was opened from within and Mr. Preston stood before her.

Had she been versed in feminine artifices, she would have made a neat little speech about being found trespassing, said it was quite shocking, and have run off, hoping to be followed by the proprietor. As it was she could say nothing, she cast her eyes down, turned pale and red by turns, and felt so guilty that she had not even courage to move away.

"Miss Mordaunt!" said Preston, "I suppose the Colonel is outside the garden? It was kind of him to come and see if I was returned. Odd enough, I was just setting off for Marfield, so I shall be able to walk back with you. Have you got the dogs with you? Then I must take care of Wolf. Here, Wolf, Wolf;" and seeing her confusion, he tried by talking on to re-assure her.

The hound came bounding down the passage,

Mordaunt caught him by an ear and holding him so, moved out. Evelyn walked on rather quickly, while he locked the door, and even hoped to distance him and recover her confusion alone, but he was soon by her side again. It must be confessed that this occurrence sent a thrill of pleasure through Preston. He at once acquitted Eve of knowing of his return, indeed he had not admitted such a thought for more than a second; but this visit of hers to his house, when she thought he was away, was a tacit but complete confession of her love. It certainly was delightful to be so loved even by this child, in so tender a manner that even his house had such an interest for her. He guessed the whole truth easily, and her confusion made mistake impossible. At another time he would, like a honorable man, have refused to take advantage of this confession, but this day he had something to say to Eve.

By the time he had scared the three dogs away, and induced Wolf to follow humbly at

his heels, Evelyn had recovered her confusion a little, and at last spoke out.

“I am sure you must think I wanted to steal something, or to pry about the Wynch; but I assure you I didn’t. I hope you don’t think so. Only you must know that before you came to the Wynch, Meg and I often used to come and look at it; we were so fond of it, because it is such a strange old house.”

“And since I have been there, you don’t care so much about it, eh?” said he, smiling at her simplicity.

“Oh! yes we do; only you know when you are there we couldn’t come, and so as I thought you were away, I thought I would just come and see it once more before you came back.”

“And as ill-luck would have it, I reached home only about an hour ago. But never mind, Miss Mordaunt, I feel my old nest has received a great honour, and as you are so fond of it, I shall henceforth be doubly so. If the Colonel had been with you, I would have shown you the rats and bats inside, and intro-

duced you to something like a study, all books, and no luxuries."

"Have you been in London all this time?"

"Don't talk to me of London," said Preston.

"I am glad to be back. You can't tell how glorious it is to be here again, to see pure simple faces like yours after the hard smiles of fashion, and the careworn look of business. I feel as if I was indeed come home again."

"I am sure papa will be glad to see you. He has been talking so much about you, and we have been so very lonely."

"And is the silent woman glad to see me," said he tenderly.

She turned up her eyes to his, and she couldn't help it if their beaming look betrayed all the joy she felt. But the next moment she remembered herself, and went among the roses of Lancaster. He took her hand and stopping her, stood opposite to her. At that moment her heart beat like a flail, and she almost trembled with expectation.

"Last night," he said, "I took a solemn resolution. I have made up my mind to marry before the year is out."

She waited, she did not dare to look up. Would he speak now, or what did he mean? She was so confused, she felt she should never be able to say either yes or no. Oh! happy moment! and yet she longed for it to be over.

Suddenly he dropped her hand, and said quietly: "Is your sister come home?"

At that her heart fell, like a lark that has soared too high.

"No," she answered in a low voice.

They walked on in silence a little way.

"Do you think she would have me?" he asked in a jesting tone.

"I don't know. You must ask her yourself," she answered bitterly. The poor thing felt the tears struggling into her eyes—all her hopes raised so high a moment before, had been crushed. Then she added, "that is if you wish it."

Preston smiled ; but he felt he was playing a cruel game. Her voice showed how she was suffering.

"Do you think," said he, "I would offer to any one before I knew for certain that I should be accepted. No, no ; I am going to ask one to be my wife who, I know, will say yes."

"Then I am sure it is no one in Wilton," she answered, glad to have her revenge.

"How can you tell?"

"There is no one else pretty but Margaret ; there's only Maria Thornton. Perhaps it is she."

"Thank you, no. I don't seem to care much about Maria Thornton."

"There is nobody else at all."

"There is Miss Evelyn Mordaunt, for instance."

"Oh, me ! I'm nobody, I never count," she answered hurriedly, and blushing up to the temples.

"I see the silent woman is become morbid of late ; it is foolish of her, very. Perhaps

there are people who count her, and leave out all the village beside. But, come, let us talk of something else. How is Mr. Wytham?"

But she did not want to talk of Mr. Wytham, and she would not answer, but walked on with her eyes on the ground, and the little under lip pouting out, for she was angry with herself at having revealed so much. Preston did all the talking, therefore, and rattled on about the gaieties of London, and sang snatches of songs, and seemed in a very excited and rather anxious state.

"I feel mad to-day—I know I shall go mad," he said; and it seemed like it.

Still Evelyn would not answer; and when they reached the garden gate he stopped, drew his hand slowly across his eyes, and muttered aloud: "Shall I?"

"What?" asked Eve quietly. Then she suddenly added, "Oh! I do think you are gone quite mad. Please, Mr. Preston, don't be so strange with papa, because I am sure he will think you mad."

"Do you know," he answered, "I have made up my mind to several things. First of all I mean to dine with the Colonel and you."

"Well, to be sure! but papa is sure to ask you to."

"Secondly, I mean after dinner to talk very gravely to the Colonel, and tell him I want a wife."

"Oh! don't be so foolish, Mr. Preston."

"Is there anything foolish in wanting a wife? But listen. Thirdly, if he consents I —"

But then again he drew his hands across his eyes, and muttered something to himself. Then he stamped his foot, knit his brows, and swung his cane round, and Evelyn was quite frightened.

"Come, Evelyn—I mean Miss Evelyn," said he merrily the next moment; "don't think me the greatest fool that ever lived. London has turned my head a little. Let us go in; come along, silent woman."


Evelyn set off and ran up the path, darted into the drawing-room, and cried out,

"Papa, he is come back; he is going to dine with us;" and then rushed up to her own room.

She did not know whether to cry or laugh, so she wisely did neither, or rather an hysterical mixture of both. But at last she succeeded in persuading herself that this was only one of Mr. Preston's eccentric fits, and when she came down to dinner, she was as quiet as ever again.

The Colonel, who had been very dull for the last month, and been forced to take to Board Meetings and Road Committees to keep himself alive, was so delighted to see Preston again, that for the time he forgot his promise to Wytham, and at once asked him to stay to dinner.

That meal, however, did not pass very merrily. Preston talked enough for some time, and both the Colonel and Evelyn observed a change in his manner—less brusquerie, and



more of the sneering tone of London conversation ; but when, during a pause, he looked up at Evelyn, she noticed that he became suddenly absent and inattentive to what the Colonel was saying.

She left the room immediately after dinner, contrary to custom ; but had not closed the door when she heard Preston say :

“Colonel, I am come to speak to you on a serious matter.”

She stole away to the drawing-room ; but could not rest there, and stood at the drawing-room door listening—not to their words, for those she could not hear, and would not have listened if she could have done so, but to the sound of that voice which somehow to-day she loved intensely, with quite a new feeling, one of passion and excitement. At first the voices were low, and the Colonel’s predominated ; but presently Preston’s seemed to take it up, and soon its sound grew excited, and even bitter, and she knew almost the words he must be saying.

It was now quite dark ; in fact it had been for some time, for it was the 15th of October, (she never forgot that date) ; but just now a light came down the passage. It was only Mary, the maid ; but Evelyn slipped back into the drawing-room. Mary came in and shut the drawing-room shutters, and then went over towards the dining-room to do the same. Evelyn glided after her on tiptoe till she was close to the dining-room door. Mary was one of those valuable servants who make no noise at all. She passed about the house as gently as a cat, and opened and shut the most troublesome door as quietly as a ghost.

The Colonel, therefore, did not hear her come in, and between the opening and shutting of the door, Eve, who held her breath and listened as one does for footsteps at midnight, heard her father's voice utter these words :

"Still, my dear Sir, I must repeat that Evelyn is much too young, is quite unfit to be married."

"But this youth is precisely what—"

Here the door was closed again, and the voices seemed to stop suddenly. She glided back to the drawing-room ; she longed to hear more, but dared not be seen there by Mary. She waited with a heaving bosom till the door was again opened, but this time the occupants did not speak at all. Then as if caught by a sudden madness, she ran round the room, clapping her hands, sat down at the piano, but was too full of joy to remember a note, and at last bounding up again, exclaimed, "I know what I'll do," and ran out into the hall.

Here she took down a large sombrero and a stick that were hanging on a peg near the door, and carried them off to the drawing-room, where she laid them on the sofa.

"He always forgets where he has put them," she said to herself in a gay voice ; and then having arranged this little conspiracy, she returned to the door of the drawing-room, and listened again to the sound of his voice.

And what, my good Evelyn, can you mean by this delight and this heaving of your little

bosom with excitement, when you have just heard your father refuse his consent?

"No, no," she would answer, "he will persuade him, no one can resist him, it will all be right; but what is so very nice, is that he loves me. Yes, I know it now for certain, and I am so happy, so very very happy."

Nevertheless she has her doubts, or she would not have taken his hat into the drawing-room; she is afraid something may go wrong, and she is determined to see him, to see success or failure in his own face.

At last the voices die down, and she hears the chairs pushed back. This is the moment, he is coming, coming to her. The door opens; she holds her breath, and presses her hand against her heart. It is Preston who speaks.

"No, I shall go away, I shall wander about somewhere, I can't stay here any longer, but don't mind me."

"We shall all miss you," says the Colonel, yet somewhat stiffly.

There he is wringing the Colonel's hand;

and then his voice falters as he adds in a low tone that she can scarcely catch.

“Take care of her, Colonel, take care of the poor child.”

And then the dining-room door closes. He does not come to the drawing-room, but gropes about in the dark for his hat and stick. Then she hears him mutter something, and then come across the hall. She glides back to the other side of the table, and standing there pale as a spectre, stares anxiously at the door.

He comes in ; his hair is tossed wildly about, his eyes look haggard, his face is white ; he looks round the room, but not at her. Then he goes to the sofa, takes up his hat and stick and is going. She cannot bear this, and moves slowly after him. He hears it, and turning back, comes up to her, and puts out his hand. How very cold those two hands are. He does not press hers this time, he only holds it a moment, as he looks down tenderly at her. Her large sad eyes have not been away from

him for a moment, and this once they meet his. He seems to flinch away, mutters "good bye" in a sad low voice, and then as if not trusting himself, rushes away. She stands rooted there, hears him walk quickly out, hears Wolf's bark, the door shut violently, and then going to the sofa, hides her face in her cold hands.

She is there unmoved for nearly two hours, for at last the great clock on the stairs strikes nine. Soon after this she starts up as she hears her father coming into the room.

Lyn sits up, opens her book, and seems absorbed in it. Poor Lyn, she did not see one word in it. There are two despairing thoughts in her mind that seem to chase one another through and through it, returning again and again.

"Oh, if I could only have told him how much I love him. I shall never see him again, never."

CHAPTER VII.

PRESTON walked rapidly home, muttering to himself, as better men have done under like circumstances, "what a fool I am!" but immediately consoling himself with the reflection. "She loves me, though, poor child." Certainly, at this time he loved her very tenderly—not passionately. Everything about her was so sweet, so pure, so simple, so trusting, and in its way so beautiful. Then her devotion, which she could not hide, though she fondly imagined she had not displayed it, moved him so completely. He felt now as

if his one attraction, one joy in life were gone, and he fiercely muttered to himself "I'll go back to London and turn reprobate again."

Fortunately, perhaps, when he reached his door, he tumbled over some one lying full length in front of it. The night was pitch dark, and though the body was too substantial to excite any ghostly fears, he did not at all like the idea of this uninvited human company. However, the next moment the awoken individual got up, and a boy's voice exclaimed: "Is that Mr. Preston?"

"Aye, aye; and who are you?"

"I've got a note for you from Rumford."

"A note at this time of night?"

"I've been here ever since five o'clock awaiting for you, Sir. Rumford says I was sure to wait, if it was all night long, and what Rumford says we mostly does."

Still he did not quite trust the boy, so taking from him a small dirty folded paper, and telling him to wait outside, he went

in, locked the door, lit a candle and read the following note written in *rather* canine Latin.

Which being literally interpreted, signifieth.

“Dearest. Come to me immediately to the camp. That boy will lead thee. Do not me recognise, but pretend that thou art about to buy horses, and who once only me hast seen. R.”

It was clear the writer only wished not to be, “understanded of the people.”

Late as it was, he determined to obey the summons; hastily changed his dress, drew on a pair of hessians and a very old shooting coat, and armed only with his thick stick, issued forth and joined the boy—a ragged urchin of fourteen with bare feet, at whom Wolf sniffled with considerable suspicion. It was a walk of two miles over a dreary country, and in the course often Preston made up his mind how to act.

They arrived at last at a rough country stall

at the bottom of a hill, and with high hedges on each side. In a short time they heard a sound of voices and the crying of a child, and soon a turn in the lane disclosed a low lurid light, issuing from several hidden fires. Here the lane widened out; the wind drove the smoke into their faces, and by the time they had passed through it, Preston found himself in the midst of a small camp of gipsies.

The scene was a strange one, and at once seized his artist eye and reminded him of the quaint pictures of Gerard Henthorst. There were here on each side of the lane some ten or twelve low dirty tents, grouped with a certain instinctive taste for the picturesque. They consisted chiefly of ragged blankets stretched over sticks which formed arches of about four feet high. In front of the opening of each of these primitive tabernacles, there was generally an upright screen of rags spread on sticks, and between this screen and the tent, the fire of dry twigs was smouldering, a grimy cauldron was hung above it, and those of the children

who were not asleep under the tent, were crowded round squatting on their haunches, and with their black hair and copper-coloured faces looking like young demons grinning in their native element. A woman or two with a black baby at her breast; a stout, swarthy husband paring short sticks with a long knife, or tinkling the bottom of a superannuated kettle; a handsome, dark-eyed girl of sixteen staring at the fire with her thick, black uncombed hair hanging down over her shoulders generally completed the group. Then, to make it complete, there was a ragged donkey, which looked as if it hadn't brayed for years, and was seeking consolation for its well-scarred back in the luxuries of neighbouring thistles; a low pot-bellied white pony dragging a heavy log with a clumping noise poked his nose over the screen; and a mangy dog without the spirit to prick up its ears at the approach of the strangers, got what it could of the warm fire. The whole spoke of great poverty, utter thriftlessness, indifference to life, and love of dirt.

He passed among the tents with his guide, quite overwhelmed with the Babel of tongues, the whining of hungry children, the laughter of the boys and girls, the sound of tinkering and chopping, and the lazy barks of two or three sleepy dogs, which reminded him to catch Wolf by the ears. What he did not hear there—and what you will seldom hear in a gipsy camp—was the ruffianly curses of drunken men, or the screams of ill-treated women.

At the farther end of the encampment was a tent standing a little apart from the rest, but in no way different from them, except in the absence of women and children, and the presence of a large circle of swarthy men standing round a bright fire. In the faces of these you at once saw that difference of tribe, which was once an actual difference of race, and which has been preserved since the time when these wanderers were driven from the plains of Hindostan more than six centuries ago. Here were tall, stalwart, heavy figures, and round thick faces

with something of the Tartar features; here thin active men, with the long Hindu face, the aquiline nose, the hollow cheeks, thin smiling lips and bright eyes, with that arch, almost cunning, expression peculiar to the Romany. The former went by the tribular name of Stanley, the latter by that of Smith, and they considered themselves as the purest remnants of the "Egyptians," (as they often called themselves), and claimed descent from Pharoah himself, with whom they have no more to do than I with the Emperor of China.

In spite of their dirt, or perhaps rather in consequence of it, these men formed a most picturesque group, and just at this time a rather lively one. In the midst of them was a young stripling of eighteen, barefoot, capless, and scarcely covered with his rags, but with an impudent and careless look on his long dark face as if his pockets were filled with bank-notes. He was chattering glibly as Preston and his guide approached, telling a story to some unseen person who was crouched down behind

the screen, pulling his forelock with pert deference, gesticulating violently with his hands and arms, and laughing himself and raising a laugh in those round him.

“You see, master, this was how it was. When I saw those two cocks a fighting in the yard, thinks I there’ll be some sport up, and good or evil, I don’t say, but in I goes, never thinking to do any harm. Well, master, here were the two cocks pecking one another’s eyes clean out; it would have been a mercy to separate them, thinks I, and here was the wall, and here was I a creeping up quite respectably, and who should take it into his head to interfere with my innocent amusement, but a dirty little dog, as nasty a mangy mongrel with no hair on his tail and one ear hanging in strips, as you ever see in your life, master. But it’s just the sort that bites, them nasty mangy things, and I was mightily afraid, master, and wanted to run for it, but there right in front of me were them two cocks at it still. Well, what with pity for their lives and fear for mine,

I rushes at 'em, picks one of them off, carrying the other's eye away in his beak. I'll swear it as sure as I'm a Romany chal; and was I a-going to let him down again in safety, when who should put her great stupid head out of the kitchen door, but the dairy-maid; so to save suspicion I just put the fellow into my coat pocket, intending to bring him back directly, master, only just as I was getting away, the farmer himself comes by, and the stupid doodle in my pocket begins to set up a—"

Here he imitated the cock's crow to perfection.

"And so, master, to save suspicion again, I squeezed his throat to keep him quiet, and—"

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared the bystanders.

"It's true, master, as sure as you've the comeliest face of any lad in the camp," said the young rascal, bending forward, cocking his head on one side, and extending his hand towards the unseen man at the fire with an

attitude purely Oriental, servile, and impertinent at the same time. "And so, master, when the thing was dead by my squeezing it to hold its cackle, I thought to myself it's no use to be taking it back again to the yard, for then they'll charge me with murther, which is worse than stealing—"

Another laugh at the boy's impudence.

"But, master, I'll tell you, it won't be fair to give me too much for this business, for when I had had the trouble to pluck, and gut, and roast the fellow all by myself, he was so tough that I couldn't get anything but skin off him."

The whole of this ingenious story was made the more characteristic by a liberal interweaving of Romany and flash words, which I have translated for your benefit, as I wish you to read my story without a glossary; and by the peculiar movements with which the narrator accompanied it. At one moment he looked the picture of meek contrition, at the next drew himself up with well mimicked indigna-

tion ; now he was pointing with his long black fingers upon the palm of his other hand, now bending his whole body forward in supplication. Preston, unseen, stood for a minute or two immensely amused, and now waited to see the upshot.

“Strip his arm,” cried a deep voice from behind the screen, “and see if there is a *chig* upon it.”

Hereupon the boy capered about, put himself in an attitude of defence, chattered more rapidly than ever, and did his utmost to prevent it.

“Hold that row,” cried the same voice ; “are we to have the darky down on us for your chattering?”

The boy was silent, and allowed his ragged sleeve to be removed. Then his arm was turned towards the fire, and closely examined by the man who held him.

“One,” cried this man.

“It’s a lie,” said the boy, struggling again. As he turned, his quick eyes caught sight of

Preston, and pointing into the dark, he cried out,

“There he is—there’s the farmer himself come for me.”

At this all the men turned round in some trepidation, and Preston came forward.

“Is there a man named Rumford here?” he asked.

“Aye, aye, master,” said the deep voice behind the screen, “I’m your man. Take the boy to the quarry, and give it him well.”

So saying, up jumped the speaker.

He was a splendid fellow certainly, not much above the middle height, but beautifully proportioned, and with the figure of a Hercules; massive yet not overpowering shoulders, a full broad chest, large bold lips, and a strong firmly set leg. His dress did not differ from that of the others, consisting of a dirty brown jacket over an old red waistcoat, gaiters and thick shoes, and an ample scarlet handkerchief tied loosely round his throat. On his head was an old pudding hat without a brim, and over his jacket he was now wearing loosely an

Irishman's great coat, very much patched, and with little more than the shreds of the upper cape left to it. But the face was very striking. Though a little lighter in colour, it was of the pure gipsy type, of the handsomest mould, and somewhat more refined than those round him. But there was the same long narrow face, oval chin, and aquiline nose, and a firm but well-shaped mouth, the thin upper lip resting resolutely on a thick lower one. Then the large black eyes had all the sparkle in them of the boy's whom he had just sent away; the forehead was very low, but broad and strongly developed, and the coarse black hair fell on each side of the face in two thick ringlets, which reached to about the bottom of the jaws. He had no hair on his face, and there are few gipsies who have any.

"Well, master, I sent the boy up for you in the afternoon," said he, touching his brimless hat. "It don't matter if you're ready to come over with me to Launceston to-night. We can see the colt there all the same, and a

pretty animal it is, on the faith of an Egyptian."

"Ah! we'll have a talk about that, first, my good fellow," said Preston, true to his part.

"Talk, oh! I'll talk fast enough; but if we're to go to-night, we must be budging at once, and we can talk by the way."

He turned round, said a few words to a man near him, and walked along with a kind of stride, while the others dispersed to their tents.

He chatted glibly about the imaginary colt till they were out of the lane, and then stopping and looking carefully round, he said to Preston:

"It's too far to go to Launceston to-night. We had better get up to your diggings and discuss matters there. You got my note—a fine specimen of Latin, wasn't it, considering I haven't opened a Latin book since I was at Harrow."

Preston burst fairly into a laugh.

“Who on earth could imagine you have been at Harrow, if they saw you now? You are gipsy from foot to head, Rumford.”

“You couldn’t pay me a better compliment, my boy, and I hope my friends there think the same. Why, bless your soul, I *am* a gipsy to all intents and purposes. I told you my grandmother was one. She married a stable-boy who rose to be George the Third’s training groom, and so out of the two we got the genius for breaking in colts and pattering flash. The Rumfords are the best riders in the three kingdoms, my beauty—”

“And the greatest backguards.”

“We got that too from the gipsy. She used to run away from the stable-boy once a year for a month or so. She couldn’t live in a house and be happy, and I don’t believe I could now. She used to tell him she was very fond of him, and would always be faithful to him, but she must have her ramble in the summer, and so she did.”

“But how did you find me out?”

“Simply enough. We met a lot of Stanleys near Stratford-on-Avon about a fortnight ago, who told us of a gentleman who had slept in the camp, and enquired about me. I was frightened you may be sure, my boy. I thought you had been saying a little too much, and let the cat out. However, they didn’t seem to twig, though these gipsies are the most suspicious people going, and from them I learned exactly where you lived, and from their description I guessed it to be you.”

Preston and Rumford had not seen one another for nearly a year, and therefore had their adventures to relate; but as these have nothing to do with my story, I shall land them in the Wynch and go on.

While Preston went to fetch some wood from the kitchen, Rumford, left alone, examined the room, the books, papers, and even the MS. that lay on the table, and pulling out a small note-book took a hurried inventory of some things that struck him.

“It’s as cold as charity to-night,” said Preston

laying the fire with a dexterity that would have astounded some of his old companions of the —th Dragoons.

“Cold !” answered the other. “Bosh ! man ; I can scarcely breathe in this close room. When you come to live in the open air for a twelvemonth, you soon lose all perception of heat and cold. Talk of hermits, why the Fakir who has been perched on one leg on the summit of some Hímalayan mountain for the last ten years, and hopes to go on ten more, and make his fortune by it, is nothing but a humbug. He never felt anything after the first three months, you may be sure.”

“But you are always squatting round a fire.”

“Yes ; summer and winter alike. We love warmth, which is another proof of Oriental origin ; but we feel neither heat nor cold as you heathens do. It’s only these half-caste fellows, born of intermarriages, that settle down in towns in the winter. But stop, man alive, you don’t know how to make a fire.”

So saying he coolly pulled Preston's deftly laid wood out of the grate, and threw it all down on the hearth.

"That's the proper place for a fire," said he, propping the fagots against one another, and laying the paper in the hollow beneath, "only you should have straw. You barbarians are centuries behind us in common sense matters. Look how it blazes now!"

Then squatting upon the floor, and thrusting his head between his knees, he proceeded to blow up a flame with the natural bellows. He appeared, too, to prefer this position, and remained thus for the rest of the evening.

"So you like the gipsies?" said Preston dreamily. "But stop, I suppose you want something to drink."

"Drink! my dear fellow, we never drink anything but water. You never saw a pure gipsy drunk yet; and to say the truth, they haven't much temptation to be so, for except at races and fairs, where we make a pretty pocketful by my Aunt Sally and so forth, we've never

more than just enough to support life. Then a gipsy can't endure the inside of a close pot-house, and generally speaking you'll find that whether gipsies or not, these wandering classes drink very little compared with the rural population."

"Then what are their chief vices?"

"Oh! my good man, if you think that because one is born under a hedge, married in a hovel, and dies in a ditch, he is necessarily a bad man—you are very much mistaken. My own opinion is that the wandering classes of England have only two besetting sins—they are thieves and liars; but to counter-balance this, they don't drink, and they have the best heart in the world. They are the only poor in the kingdom who are really grateful. I know one of our lot, for instance, get a bit of bread and bacon and a few coppers from a house, go and not be in the neighbourhood, perhaps, six years, and yet remember that he treated there, and refuse to steal the farthing from them."

“But they are a ferocious lot at times, eh?”

“Give a dog a bad name, you know. A great deal that is done by common tramps is put down to gipsies; but I’ll be bound you won’t find among the murders committed in the whole kingdom, a single one traced to a gipsy. Then they don’t beat their wives and children, nor delight in quarrels, grumbling, and so forth. They are a jovial and a feeling people. If there’s one ill in a camp, you’ll find the whole lot ready to do what they can, and anxious, too, about it.”

“But their women are very bad; are they not?”

“Like the Quaker, I’ll say to you, ‘first thee tells a lie, friend, and then thee asks a question.’ Their women are as virtuous as any in the country, a vast deal more so than those of the agricultural population. It’s true they are sometimes immodest in action and dress, and coarse in language; but it goes no farther. No, the Tchigan’s ambition, and that which

tempts him to crime is—property, that is moveable property—pack-horses, donkeys, a new tent, and above all, finery in dress. For the sake of these he will steal, or cheat, or wheedle you out of your money in every imaginable way ; but he won't cut your throat : and what's more, he won't gossip away your character as your peaceful rustic will. To my mind he's both a better and a more agreeable man than the British peasant, who, I'm inclined to think, is about as bad a lot as you can find in the civilized world."

" You're right there ; though I suspect you are partial. But how about their religion ?"

" Haven't got any, and don't want it," answered Rumford bluntly.

" What do you mean ?"

" I mean what I say ; that they know none of the forms, and very few of the doctrines of Christianity ; they are better without them."

" No, no, not that."

" I am certain of it. I believe forms were

invented by the devil, to make people forget the truth. I believe going to church to be a snare, especially to the poor, who are almost taught by the parson to consider that Sunday visit as the panacea for damnation. As for the rest, you philosophers say that the form gives the spirit visible, tangible substance; but for my part I'm inclined to think it is much more often mistaken for the spirit itself. I should like to know whether my Lord A——, who requires a bishop and three beneficed clergymen to unite him to the rich Miss B——, whom he cares no more for than I for Sappho or Desdemona, is nearly as much married as Kavi Stanley and Alice Smith, who join hands under a hedge, and agree in the presence of the tribe to be man and wife, and mean it, too—if hearts mean anything.”

And Rumford, holding his knees in his arms, rocked himself back, looking triumphantly at Preston.

“The question is a deeper one than all that, and we have too much to talk of now, my dear

fellow, to waste our time in a discussion. Heaven knows," he added with a sigh, "there are too many obstacles in life to prevent two real lovers from marrying without multiplying forms; but of their expediency I say nothing just now. But have those people no remnants of an Oriental faith?"

"That's all nonsense. The gipsies have nothing really to conceal, and if they know anything about themselves, you could with a little tact soon worm it out of them. But they are fond of mystery; they have nothing but their race to distinguish them from the scum of the earth, and so, very naturally, they invest it with the greatest possible interest. But the real religion of a Romany is that which nature and conscience dictate. They know that there must be something beyond this life, (they, poor things, without an aim or a comfort in life sincerely hope it,) and they guess that what is punished on earth will be punished hereafter. They know there is a Creator, and believe Him merciful. They have heard remotely—for the

clergy never care for them, and can rarely get hold of them—that God Himself has somehow made a sacrifice to which we must look as atonement for our sins. They have heard of the name of Jesus in connection with this. They read no Bible—they can't read as a rule—and if they did, it would do them as much good, I suppose, as it does so many of our Bible readers, who satisfy their consciences by reading, without ever attempting to understand, so many chapters, sigh over it, and shake their heads, and are then ready for a jollification."

"And so you are a kind of judge among them?"

"No—I find their chief fault to be an addiction to appropriating their neighbours' goods, and this I have tried to stop."

"And what is this mark that they were looking for on the boy's arm?"

"The *chig* ? That is a brand which used to be made on girls who had gone wrong—for gipsies had once a law of their own. I revived it among the families that I have met with in

order to show how often the prisoner had been convicted of theft."

"Well, we must leave this subject Rumford, and now to business. You have papers, I suppose for me?"

"Ye-es," he answered, undoing his belt, opening his waiscoat and shirt and drawing from his body a broad linen girdle in which the papers were concealed. "I shall be glad to get rid of them, and I may take this opportunity of telling you that I don't mean to prepare any more."

"How so?"

"I don't seem to care about the danger and trouble. It makes my life a nuisance to think that some day these fellows may find me out. Besides I think Hibberd's scheme is humbug—a little too Utopian and romantic ever to come to any good."

"Then, my dear Rumford, you take a very shallow view of it. Listen to me. We found you an independent devil-may-care fellow, who hated heartily all the humbug and flummery of

the world, and we asked you to join us." Preston spoke authoritatively.

"Good—"

"You chose this branch yourself, and promised to furnish notes amply, but though you seized on the idea of this kind of adventure with eagerness, I don't think you knew to what end you were asked to aid us."

"Something about regenerating mankind, ha—ha."

"Nothing of the kind. It was a purely political question. You met with a body of real patriots, men who see their country gradually sinking in the eyes of the world, and wish to make one last struggle to raise her up again—men who so far from dreaming have gone to work in the most practical manner, examining and enquiring into everything before they took a single measure, and employing for this purpose independent spirits free from prejudice and that very 'humbug' you were always abusing. But where is the difficulty these men expe-

rience? In the very body that governs the country."

"There's where I find fault with you, my boy. Raise the lower orders; lift from below and you'll lift the whole mass."

"True enough, but you must begin above. You can never get a good measure passed, till you have removed the main obstacles in the House itself. Well, we find every honest national question reduced by these place-lovers to one of party. We found the very House of Commons itself openly breaking and encouraging the breach of laws which it made to satisfy the nation, and continually throwing dust in the nation's eyes. Look for instance at the Bribery question, on which I have lately been engaged. Demoralization high and low, parties uniting firmly to support their adherents with money, a Carlton and a Reform collecting, scarcely with even decent reserve, a fund for this very purpose, and giving peerages to the men who subscribe the most—in short, our rulers themselves combining to defeat their own laws

and then pacifying indignant John Bull by the disfranchisement of some wretched borough. But it is not one question like this, it is almost every great question about which there is a tacit conspiracy to mislead the nation. There are questions by the dozens which never can be mooted, because the whole House is interested in leaving them alone. The Constitution wants purging—”

“But a handful of men, like us, can’t do it.”

“Wait—I say that we want a small but determined party in the House and out of the House, who will act from pure principle and pure wisdom. We want, if possible, to oppose and annul the power of selfish interest in our rulers. We find that one reform after another must be abandoned, because the very men who compose the Senate of the country are those whose interests such reforms would affect.”

“But how get this party up, man?”

“Well, there are only three agents of any power in this country—influence, money and

talent, and the third is almost powerless without one of the other two. Now if you add to these, union, independence and pluck, you can almost make sure of success. In the men that he selected for the preliminary work, Hibberd showed his usual discernment. We have all more or less independence of spirit, talent or learning, pluck or perseverance. Then Hibberd himself, in virtue of his position, collects the influence. I have here a list of people who have promised to support us."

"I don't want to see it."

"And as for money we shall soon be drenched with gold, like Danae. You know that many of us gave up our fortunes to the enterprize."

"You for one; did you not?"

"Yes. I reserved £300 a-year for my wants, never dreaming that I should marry, and determined to spend as little as possible of that even."

"There's something noble in that. It reminds one of those jolly old Romans, who brought out treasure when the state felt

shaky. Don't you remember in Livy, when Hannibal was coming down on them. Well, I never had any fortune to give, for my part. But, my good man, while I wish your patriotic project every success, I don't think you'll do much more than make a fuss."

"If we can get one bill through in which the interest of the influential members will be sacrificed, or in which event vital measures cannot be made a handle for the paltry ambitions of parties, we shall have half won our battle; we shall have made the House for once in a way act in a pure spirit of devotion to the country at a sacrifice to itself. What we shall then attempt to do will be to create a powerful but thoroughly pure Opposition, renouncing for ever the allurements of place, and whose sole object will be to act as a check upon and stimulant to the actual Government whatever may be its colours. I think we have proved that we can make sacrifices, and these are sometimes greater than you imagine. Only

to-day, Rumford, I discovered what it is to throw up an income of £3000 a-year."

"Ah! how was that?"

"A very old story. I wanted to marry."

"And the parents refused?"

"Not strictly on the ground of fortune. The old father is not a worldly man; but it did turn the scale. I saw that."

"Tell me all about it, old fellow." He saw that Preston was longing for a little sympathy.

"Well, then, I must first tell you that I am not in love."

"No, no; love and ambition don't live in the same nest."

"Not amicably at any rate; the one is always bothering the other. But imagine to yourself a child of sixteen, very pretty, very good, simple as a violet, and utterly innocent of the world. Imagine that before you have said one tender word to her, the poor thing, too artless to conceal it, shows in every action and every look that she has given you her little heart, and, as it were, asks you to take it as a gift. Imagine

a thoroughly trusting nature, one that can never doubt, that leans upon you in full perfect faith."

"It never was my good fortune."

"Well, Rumford," he continued, leaning forward and spreading his hands over the low fire, "I saw all this long ago; and feeling that my work was in danger, I escaped from it and went up to London. Here I worked steadily for some time till I met La Manetta."

"Aha! mon ami."

"I thought I could take notes there, too, and so I went. There was the same society as ever, with little change—a little for the better. I kept pretty clear of it for some time, and I must tell you that down here I had got into admirable habits, no wine, no luxuries; the fare of a hermit, in fact. Little by little I fell back into the old train. Just for old association's sake I rattled the dice, and with my old success. Before three weeks were up I was just the man you knew me two years ago, a thorough gentleman and most unmitigated blackguard."

“Ha, ha, ha !”

“I then asked myself if there was no security against this kind of thing, if the old temptations were always to be followed by the old vices. ‘Marry,’ said Hibberd, ‘marry some one with pure tastes, who does not care for the world, and will be content with you anywhere, who, in fact, will raise you.’ You can imagine in which direction I at once turned. I came down here, saw Evelyn —”

“Evelyn ? who ?”

“Evelyn Mordaunt, the girl I described. I saw her, and at once felt that I had only to ask to be accepted ; but considering how young she was and what I had to offer, I had determined to speak to the governor first.”

“Highly honourable ; and how did the old boy take it ?”

“At first most eagerly. He seconded every thing, agreed with me as to the advantages of wedlock, and led me to think the matter settled, till I mentioned Evelyn’s name. He had thought it was Margaret I wanted.”

“ Another sister, eh ?”

“ Yes ; a clever, handsome, but far less winning girl than Evelyn. Well, upon this he made all kind of objections. First, she was too young, next I did not know her real character, then he was certain it was mere fancy on her part, and girls of her age did not know their own minds. Lastly, when I had answered every objection, he asked if I was in a position to marry. I saw he was yielding up to this point ; but when I told him that I had given the bulk of my fortune to a great public enterprise in which I was engaged, and had only retained £300 a-year, I saw it was hopeless.”

The gipsy was silent, for Preston spoke bitterly. They stretched their hands over the fire, and sat in silence for a long time, till a loud yawn from Rumford reminded his companion to look at his watch. It was past one. He showed him to his bed-room, gave him his own bed, and retiring to the study, set up many a long hour, warming his hands and thinking over it all. When the first streak of

dawn came through the windows he took his large cloak, put a couple of folios down for a pillow, and lay down.

“Well,” he thought, “there is nothing for it but work ;” and he soon dropt asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Evelyn came down next morning, the Colonel was shocked by her worn look and extreme pallor, and his conscience smote him for the misery he had caused. He decided how to act, he wrote at once to Margaret to return without delay—a summons she by no means relished.

There was an unmistakable change in Evelyn. She refused to go out, she ate nothing, she sat very quiet all day with her work ; but contrary to her usual practice, she remained down stairs with her father, and always brought her chair close to his, as if she wanted sympathy but did not dare to ask for it. The Colonel was deeply

touched by this silent grief, but dared not come upon the subject. Preston had assured him that he had made no declaration to the child, and the Colonel who had never before noticed the interest she took in him could not account for this change. His daughters had never had real griefs before, and this sorrow was therefore doubly touching. At last, on the evening before Margery's return, he determined to ask a question which had been causing him some anxiety.

"Evelyn," he said quietly, looking up from his book, "did Mr. Preston say anything to you the other day?"

She turned her large eyes up from her work with startled look, and asked quite simply :

"What about, papa?"

"About being married, Lyn."

For the first time for two days the colour came into her pale cheeks. She looked down at her work to escape her father's questioning eyes, and answered falteringly.

"He—he said he wanted to marry Margaret, papa."

"Margaret!" the Colonel almost shouted.

"That is, papa, he didn't quite say he wanted to marry her, but he asked me if I thought she would have him."

"And what did you reply?"

"I said I didn't know."

"Nothing more? are you sure you said nothing more?"

"Not about Margaret, papa."

"Ah, then he spoke about you?"

"No, papa, he—I assure you—he didn't," and she bent closer over her work, and somehow in a few minutes her fingers were wet.

"Oh! of course not. What should he have said?" said the Colonel, resuming his book, but only as an excuse.

The next morning Meggie arrived, and was soon closeted with the Colonel. Evelyn felt a certain relief, and retired to her room, meaning to stay there. She had not been long alone, when Meggie stole in.

"My poor child," she said, "what have they been doing to you?"

"Me, Meg dear! nothing to me."

"Yes, they have, they have been making you miserable."

Evelyn looked up at her sister's face, in hopes that her own would give the lie to her heart; but even as she looked the big tears formed, and in spite of herself, and rolled over the eyelids. Then she bent her head and fairly sobbed, Margery sat down by her and took her hand.

"What is it, my child?" she said kindly. "Tell me all."

But Eve only sobbed, and then in broken words wept out, "Oh! Meg dear, if I—could—only—see him—again."

There was now no doubt in Margaret's mind. She kissed her wet cheeks two or three times, then getting up, she whispered to her, "you shall see him, darling."

"No, no," sobbed Eve, "he is gone."

"But he shall come back. It will all be

right," and therewith she bounded out of the room.

But the Colonel was by no means so sanguine as his daughter, and it was not for a long time that he could agree to her plan. Soon after lunch, Eve saw them go out together; it was very unusual for them to go without her, but she did not think of offering to do so. She felt a restless presentiment all the afternoon, and, therefore, wandered about the garden, and let out the three dogs, but all to no purpose. At last as the afternoon wore on, she took her work and sat at one of the drawing-room windows waiting anxiously for their return. It was her usual corner, for everywhere about the house she had her favourite spots, and now this one was hallowed because she had been sitting here when Mr. Preston came and talked to her that first Sunday evening. It was the nearest to the porch, and she sat with her back towards the porch, Poor little Evelyn, she had no faith in Meggie's power to perform her promise, and she dreaded, while she longed for their return. She knew she would see nothing but

blank faces when they came back ; and then she thought of everything, and the more she thought, the more her tears flowed, very quietly, but in perfect streams, it seemed as if the springs of sorrow could never be dried up.

At length after long waiting, she heard slow footsteps coming towards the porch, and voices speaking low. It was evident that the Colonel and Margaret were disputing how to break the bad news to her. They passed the porch, too, and still walked slowly on. She did not dare to look up, but dried her tears as well as she could, but in vain ; they flowed afresh directly. Now the two passed the windows and she looked up. There was Margaret, indeed, but by her side, not the Colonel—no no—it was Preston.

Her tears stopped at once, but when she saw him slowly shaking his head, she thought to herself: "Ah, he does not want to see me now, he is refusing." She watched them till they reached the end of the walk, and then when they turned, she glided back into the

corner of the room, and stealthily watched them as they walked slowly back. How her little bosom throbbed now, and now he is smiling—yes he looks happy, and Meg too is pleased, what does it mean.

When they reach the porch this time they both come in. She hears him stop to hang up his hat, and hears Meg cry out: "I will run up stairs and bring her down."

At that she slips back into her place, and for very joy rains out a fresh flood of hot tears.

Mr. Preston walks slowly into the drawing-room. He does see her at once, but presently he comes without a word to the window, and leans over her with his hand on the back of the chair. Her fingers slip over her work, and she does not see what horrid long stitches she is making. She trembles too, for she cannot tell what is coming. She is so quiet and calm, that she thinks he is going to explain why he cannot marry her, or something of that kind. At last, he draws a chair quietly

to her side, and sitting down leans forward and tries to look into her face, which is bent closer than ever over her work. She knows she ought to rise and show astonishment, but she cannot.

"Evelyn," he says quietly, "you are to be my wife."

She drops the work and shrinks back from him almost frightened.

"I—I—what—?" she falters out.

"Come, you do not refuse, now Evelyn?"

She turns up her face still wet with tears, and smiles into his. She cannot speak for happiness; and so he takes up her two little hands and kisses them warmly.

At this moment Meg bounds into the room.

"She is not to be found," she cries, but then seeing the talkers in the window, she rushes out again.

Little Eve is frightened at her lover. It is the first time such words have been spoken to her. She had longed for them, but now they almost alarm her, she is so afraid of

saying or doing something too forward. She snatches her hands away, and gets up from her chair. She is afraid every moment she shall be tempted to leap to his bosom, and she thinks that would not be right. But Preston catches her hand again, and passes his arm round her waist though she shrinks from him.

"Are you willing to be my wife, tell me Evelyn?" he whispers.

"You know," is all she can murmur.

Then he draws her to him and on her warm blushing cheek presses a gentle kiss. At that she fairly tears herself from him and runs away, up to her own room to sob with joy.

The difficulty had not lain with Preston but with the Colonel.

"I am very sorry for Lyn," he said, "but I don't see how it can be remedied. If I had had the remotest idea that she cared for Preston, I would at least have left the matter undecided; but she is very undemonstrative, or rather quiet, one can't tell what she feels."

"She feels much more than one guesses,"

said Meg, "and if something is not settled, she will be ill, papa ; I am certain of it."

The Colonel was alarmed ; his daughter was very delicate, and the prospect of her illness was very dreadful.

"But you see, one can't run after a man whom you have dismissed. Ten to one, Meg, he will turn round and decline in his turn."

"Not Mr. Preston, papa ; he is far too honourable a man to do that."

"His income is very small."

"Eve is accustomed to small means."

"He is so eccentric, and we know nothing about his antecedents."

"It will break her heart."

"But she is much too young."

"They need not marry at once."

"Ah, well, if Mr. Preston will consent to wait, say a year, it might be different. But I won't have a long engagement. It is productive of nothing but annoyance, and often comes to nothing. Look at Miss Palmer, now."

So at last the Colonel yielded. Margaret

undertook the whole affair, and they walked up to the Wynch. Fortunately, perhaps, Preston was not at home ; but as they came down again in rather low spirits at not finding him, they met him near the village. His grave, melancholy look told Margaret at once that she could succeed. The Colonel discovered that he wanted to get something in the village, and Preston walked back with Margery.

"How is Evelyn?" was almost his first question.

"She is quite well, thank you ; but the poor child is in very bad spirits, very miserable, in fact."

"Is she really ? You have heard all about it, I suppose. I trust the Colonel does not suppose that I said anything to her."

"He knows you did not."

"Then she must have guessed the purport of my interview with the Colonel."

"I suppose so. She has not held up her head since you were there."

They walked on in silence, Preston upbraiding himself for having said so much to

Evelyn on that day. He thought she would have taken it as a joke. At last, Margaret said to him gravely :

“ Mr. Preston, are you sincere in your attachment to my sister ?”

“ What reason have you to doubt it. I will not pretend that I am passionately in love with so young a girl, but I feel that she is eminently fitted to make me a most excellent wife. I feel miserable without her.”

“ Then why should it not be ?”

Thereupon he related all that the Colonel had said to him, and Margaret answered for him each of the objections advanced. But when it came to the proposal to wait for a year, he inwardly flinched. Yet he could not and would not now go back. He thought of this girl's happiness or devotion to him. He felt he could never inspire so true and deep an attachment, and he knew that that would overcome all obstacles. In short, he consented, and the rest we know.

I shall now pass over the first few weeks of

their engagement. They were indeed perfectly happy during that time. Each had discoveries to make in the other, and these were always of their better qualities. Each had advances to make to closer intimacy ; each had confessions to pour out, and the stories of their past lives to narrate. It was a great joy to Preston to discover that Evelyn had not had even a fancy for another man before she saw him, and it delighted her no less when he told her openly of his old forgotten love affairs, to think that a man who (as she put it) had been so much loved by others should now be her prize. Then though Preston had had a thousand flirtations, more or less serious, he had never been engaged, and she felt that, therefore, her conquest was doubly great.

Then it was a great pleasure to him to mark her timidity, and draw out her confidence. At first she was very silent, and shrank from him ; it was so strange to her, poor thing, so completely new to be loved. And he felt he should not rudely break down this barrier between

them, and was almost as diffident in his advances as she was timid in receiving them. Yet though it overwhelmed her with confusion, how happy she was whenever he drew her to his bosom and covered her lips with kisses ; and he rejoiced to see how she tore herself away from his embrace, and how abashed she seemed when he had compelled her to submit.

There is no denying that of the two, Evelyn was the happier. At seventeen one's love is the sun of life, at thirty only an accessory to it ; at seventeen one's love blinds, at thirty it only dazzles for awhile. And little Eve was blinded by her passion, and in each of Preston's faults saw another one more loveable characteristic. His conceit, of which he had his due share, she called the consciousness of superiority, or would have called it so, if she had been up to such grand phrases ; his selfishness (he was an Englishman) was only the claiming of his natural rights ; for such a man she could do anything, and surely others were just as much in love with him as she was. And then because

the Colonel was fond of Preston, and Margaret enjoyed his conversation, and was no longer afraid that he would play with her child and then forsake her ; Evelyn thought that all the world must dote on him, and felt as if to have sole possession and property of his love was something really too happy for her. In fact she could not believe it, and very often, too often for her happiness, she said :

“ He does not really love me ; he will never marry me.”

Still Evelyn was happy in being blinded, and as yet his real faults had not come upon before her. How much happier for Preston if he had been blinded, too. The dazzling could not last, and gradually it would clear away, and he would see all things clear again.

The first deficiency he discovered in her was her ignorance. “ Never mind,” said he ; “ a deficiency, but no blemish, on the contrary a virtue. If she is ignorant, she is also innocent. If she knows little, she has, thank Heaven, not yet matured opinions or rooted prejudices.

Her very ignorance gives me an opportunity for educating her, for instilling liberal, independent views of life and its claims. By Jove, Sir, I rejoice in her ignorance ; for I can not only form her mind after my own fashion, but I can even make her aid me in my great work. The wife should aid the husband ; she should have one and the same object with him, she should be able to sympathize entirely with all his struggles, and even feel his rebuffs. She has been neglected, poor child, and she is very young. I will begin at once a course of education, and so turn tutor to my future wife."

Now little Eve was quite aware of her own defects. If there was one quality in her, about which there could be no mistake, it was her humility. She had been made to feel her want of mind first by Arthur, who always told her she was the fool of the family, then by Miss Harding, who snubbed and neglected her, and lastly by the excellent Colonel, who used to laugh at her good-naturedly enough, but still so as to frighten her into silence. Then

too she was just one of those rare beings who seem in some points of character too good for this world—only in some. Her endurance and humility were parts of her character as of her education, and Eve was one of these who can never revile again. It was a part of her *physique* too, for she was weak and delicate, and therefore naturally timid.

It was in this spirit that one evening, when Mr. Preston was not at Marfield, she had lit her father's bed-room candle for him, brought it to him and held it as he sat finishing the last lines of a novel. When he had done, he clapped the book to, and looked up at Eve with a quaint smile. The child had risen in his estimation since she had become engaged; and he now amused himself with observing her. Eve looked down timidly towards him.

"Papa," she said, "I want to ask you something, but I don't know how I shall ask it, because I can't explain myself."

"Is it something very important then, Lyn?"

"Yes, papa dear—at least, that is, to me, though you may think it nothing at all important."

"What is it, Lyn?"

"You know, papa, that I am very stupid, and Mr. Preston, you know, is so very, very clever, and I want to know, papa, if I can't manage somehow to make myself cleverer, because I am sure he must find me very stupid."

The Colonel laughed, and took the candlestick.

"We can't add cubits to our stature, Lyn," said he getting up.

"But are there not some books which would make me clever, papa?"

"There are books which might improve your mind, Lyn, but—but I'll think about it, my child. You are a good girl for wishing it, but I'll turn it over and let you know."

Which was an easy way of getting out of the difficulty.

Preston dined at Marfield the next day, and after dinner the Colonel told him of this

little conversation, and he was much touched by it.

"You see," said the Colonel, "Lyn has always been delicate. We have never liked to work her mind too much. She is stronger now and could bear it better, but upon my word, it is so long since I had anything to do with education, I scarcely know how to advise her, poor child."

"Will you leave it to me? can you trust me to teach her after my own fashion?"

"By Jove," said the Colonel, highly delighted to be relieved of the trouble, "there's nothing like Cupid, for a schoolmaster; his bow and arrow will do twice the good that a sister could. Why, I believe Lyn could learn hydrostatics or Hebrew, from you Preston."

Preston in spite of his asserverations, was an arrant theorizer, and he had theorized on education among other things. His grand principle was to prepare the mind for the receipt of knowledge before any actual knowledge was supplied to it. Besides his anxiety, therefore,

to improve his little wife, he now saw an admirable opportunity for testing his principles. Of one thing he could assure himself, Evelyn would be a most willing pupil.

She too was delighted with the project, for hitherto their evenings had been spent in the drawing-room, where she could not feel at her ease with her lover, and was too shy to say a word to him. Now they were to have the dining-room to themselves, and she should have him all to herself. Preston, therefore, took an early opportunity of explaining his plan to her.

“ You see, Lyn,” (he had adopted the Colonel’s abbreviation which he thought prettier than “ Eve”) “ the mind is composed of perception, memory and reason, for with imagination we have nothing to do at present. Now these are the powers which must be cultivated. One must learn to see whatever one does see in as complete a manner as possible. It is not enough, for instance, to say “ this is a flower, a violet or a rose.” We must learn

to examine it more closely, to number its petals, to perceive its peculiar beauties, to ask ourselves for what purpose it possesses this or that peculiarity. So too in reading a book, it is not enough merely to understand the primary meaning of a sentence; you must be able to see its object, its connection with the context and its secondary meaning, if it have any. Above all, the perception of *Design* should be cultivated in examining nature, since that is in fact the perception of the mind of God. Now which of the three mental powers should you say we should first cultivate?"

"I don't know," said Eve, leaning her head on her hand.

"But think a little, my child."

"Will you please tell me their names again?"

"Perception, memory and reason."

A long pause during which Evelyn believes, she is thinking, but in reality is only trying to make a good guess.

"Reason," she answers at last.

“No, sweet; you can’t reason till you have facts to reason on, and these facts must be gathered by means of perception. But then perception is of no use unless you can keep what it gathers, so that the memory must first be cultivated.”

“Oh! I see now.”

Much, therefore, to her dismay, he took a Gibbon from the book-shelf, set her a passage to learn by heart, and arranged to hear it the next evening.

Poor little Eve never could learn by heart. She would have travelled twenty miles on foot, have dug half-an-acre, have carried a sack of wheat or what not of physical labour, to please Preston, but this mental work was appalling to her. For many hours, therefore, after the rest were gone to bed she went over and over that passage of the great historian. “The ruin of Paganism in the age of Theodosius, is perhaps the only example of the total extirpation of any ancient and popular superstition; and may, therefore, deserve to be considered, as

a singular event in the history of the human mind," and so on for about a page. The next morning she neglected music, and work, and novel-reading all for that one uninteresting passage, the words of which eventually danced about before her eyes in the most hopeless jumble. Nevertheless before seven o'clock, the hour at which Preston now regularly came, she had the ruin of Paganism as glib as a parrot has the naughty remarks he is taught to assail strangers with, and repeated it to herself very rapidly without once raising or lowering her voice, or putting the slightest expression into it.

Preston, however, got into a long talk on some newspaper event with the Colonel, and Evelyn sat working, muttering the ruin of Paganism to herself, and every second minute raising her big eyes anxiously and imploringly to Preston, and almost wished there were no newspapers in the world to keep him from her.

The moment he got up, her face changed to an expression of delight, and she ran eagerly

across the hall. This run of Evelyn's was so often repeated that it ought to be described. It was the prettiest little run imaginable; she took very short quick steps on the tips of her toes, scarcely touching the ground, bent her head a little and smiled—she always smiled when running, I can't tell why—and put out her hands something like a child running for protection to its mother. At the end of the run she was sure to turn sharp round and laugh heartily, or put up with mock gravity a look that said, "Isn't that a feat?" On this occasion she ran into the dining-room and shutting the door held it against Preston for a few minutes, while he begged and commanded to be let in. I may mention here that this little bit of fun so pleased its originator that for a long time she repeated the feat every night, till Preston said he thought the joke was stale.

When she let him in, she put up her face so prettily, that Preston was charmed, and then they walked arm-in-arm very stately to the fire, when Preston took the Colonel's arm-chair.

"Now, little woman, have you done your work?"

"Yes, I know it quite by heart, but I know I shan't be able to say a word of it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, but I know I shan't," she answered, pouting, "must I say it, I don't want to."

"Eve," said he gravely, and she was grave in a minute.

"Now sit down in that opposite chair and begin," he said.

"Don't you want the book?"

"No, I read the passage yesterday, and know it by heart."

Eve sat down opposite to him and hung her head, looking very miserable.

"Fire away, silent woman. I'm waiting."

Not a word from Eve.

"Have you forgotten it already?"

"No."

"Then go a-head. 'The ruin of Paganism.'"

"The ruin of Paganism," repeated Eve in a very low voice.

"Well what comes next? go on, there's a good girl."

"I can't pronounce that horrid long name," she whined.

"What, not Theodosius?"

"Theo—Theo—Theo—anything. Theododles—I don't know."

A stern look from the tutor, and out came "Theodosius."

"Now then, taciturn female, oblige me by proceeding with the ruin of Paganism."

Never a word from Eve, except a repetition of "Theododles" which seemed to have taken her fancy. Preston waited with exemplary patience, but in vain.

"You say you know it, therefore repeat it, child."

"I can't say it when you're looking at me."

Preston wheeled his chair round in the winking of an eye.

"And now I can't see you—that's so nasty."

Preston wheeled round again and stared into the fire. But the more he waited the more

silent she was. He thought she was timid about this first lesson, and so at last he said, "Come here to me."

She came readily, and drawing her gently down, he made her sit near him. He put his arm round her slight waist, and she laid her cheek against his and also stared into the fire. Now if some genie of the Arabian Nights had that moment arisen through the flames, and pronounced a spell by which Preston and she would have to sit like that in that chair for a thousand years, feeling just as they then felt, Eve would have blessed that genie from the bottom of her heart. All she wanted in this world was to be close to Preston ; but just now to spoil all her happiness, there was that odious ruin of Paganism, which had gone clean out of her head, the moment she was alone with him.

"You are nervous, pet," he said kindly, "you will be able to say it better near me, won't you ? Don't be in a hurry. Life is long enough for a passage of Gibbon, so go softly and coolly to work. Now begin—the ruin of Paganism—"

"The ruin of Paganism—"

"Very good—go on," a few minutes pause and then he helped her again, "in the age of Theodosius."

"In the age of Theo—Theo—Theododles. Oh! how silly I am."

"I never contradict ladies. But go on—let him be Theododles for once. So then in the age of Theodosius—"

"In the age of Theodosius—"

"Well, what's next?"

"I don't know."

"Why you said you knew it by heart."

"So I did, only you wouldn't come, you were so unkind, you would go talking to papa about some stupid thing, and so I forgot it all."

"That only proves that your memory wants a good deal of cultivation. But I'll tell you, child, I vote we leave Theodosius to ruin Paganism, as I see he doesn't interest you, and—let me see, you like poetry, don't you?"

"Oh! yes; I'm sure I could learn lots of poetry."

"Then to-morrow you shall say some short poem. Suppose we take Shelley's 'Skylark' that we were reading the other day."

"Very well; I really will learn that well, and be a good girl to-morrow. Are you—are you very angry with me for not saying that stupid thing?"

"Angry, sweet? with you?" and he proved he was not, in a very demonstrative manner, to which Lyn offered no resistance.

When he was trudging home that evening he said to himself, "the poor child is still very shy of me. She knew that passage well enough, but hadn't the courage to say it." And so, delightfully deceived himself, which was undoubtedly the best plan.

As for Lyn she was very much vexed with herself for this scene, and muttered repeatedly, "Oh! he will soon find out how very stupid I am, and then he won't love me any more!"

Preston had resumed his work steadily; and

as he gave up his evenings to Evelyn, he now rose very early and worked double time during the day. He abolished many of his unnecessary occupations, and even his morning walk ; but in the afternoons he often walked with the two girls. He was still sometimes very jolly on these occasions, but, generally speaking, he was a graver man now that he had entered on his engagement and begun to educate his little wife, as he persisted in calling her. The Colonel was rather pleased at this change, and said to Margaret :

“I like to see Preston teaching Lyn and taking trouble with her. It shows he is sincere.”

“Oh!” said Margaret, “I daresay they don’t do much education in the dining-room. It’s only an excuse to be alone.”

The next evening Preston took care to stay a very short time in the drawing-room ; but it made no difference. There was just the same scene with the “Skylark” as there had been with Theodosius, and it ended with Preston’s

repeating each line and, Evelyn saying it after him like a parrot. He was vexed, but would not show it.

"Now," he said, "you have repeated it once, Lyn, you can do so again. But I want to teach you to throw out your voice, so suppose you go to the other end of the room, and repeat it so that I can hear it."

"Oh! no, I couldn't say a word over there, and besides it's so cold!"

"Then stay here, and I will go the other end of the room," he said, jumping up.

"Oh! no, please don't—don't go away from me."

But Preston was beginning to lose patience. He passed his hand across his eyes, and thought to himself: "All this looks like obstinacy. Heaven grant it may not be so; but I must break it at once."

He therefore stationed himself at the other end, and told her to go on. But Eve said never a word. He was certain she knew it, because when he himself had made a mistake

she had set him right, and he thought it was mere childishness now."

"Come, Evelyn, I beg that you will give this up and say it properly."

Evelyn sat down on the arm-chair and leant her head on her hand, but said never a word.

"Come, Lyn sweet, begin.

"'Hail to thee, blithe spirit—'

Go on."

No, she said nothing. She was trying to, poor thing! she knew well enough, but she was too timid to speak out. It was making a kind of display which to her, who had always been kept in the background, was almost appalling. In fact, I don't pretend to know her motive for this conduct, but I know she could not bring herself to say a word.

"Obstinacy," muttered Preston, leaning against the wall; "obstinacy, I'm afraid."

She heard him muttering, and saw a dark look on his face; and this sight finally drove out of her head any remembrance she may

have had of the poem. She was only thinking of him now, and preparing to meet the coming storm.

He spoke kindly and quietly, but decisively.

"You remember, Evelyn," he said, "that you accepted my offer to teach you, that you yourself expressed a wish to improve. It is not, therefore, to please me that I ask you to learn these things by heart, but purely for your own sake. If I am to continue teaching you, and if you are to profit by it, you must obey me. Obedience is the first law between master and discipline. Without it there is no hope of success. Now, Evelyn, I will ask you once more. Have you learnt this poem?"

"Yes," in a very low voice.

"Then do you know it?"

"MS," (which was occasionally her mode of saying "yes.")

"Then I command you to say it," very sternly.

No answer. A pause of two minutes; no answer. Then Preston took out his watch.

"Then, Evelyn, I shall leave you," he said, and turned to the door.

She made a start as if to stop him, but immediately checked herself, thinking: "He wants to go; he is tired of me."

Preston crossed to the drawing-room, wished the Colonel and Margery good night, and then took his hat from the peg in the hall. It had become a regular custom with Eve to go out with him into the hall when he left, and here the last tender words took a long time to say. To-night she did not come. He would not leave her in anger, though, and he opened the door very softly and looked in. There she was seated on the same chair, staring into the fire, but down her cheeks were rolling streams of large silent tears, and every now and then came a short convulsive sob. Preston was touched. It was the first time he had even seen her cry, and he set it down to his own severity. "She is too frail a thing to be treated like a school-boy," he thought to himself as he stole up to her chair,

and bending down tried to look into her face. But she turned it away from him ; she did not want him to see her tears.

“ Then you are very angry with me, Lyn ? ” he asked pleadingly.

She shook her head, but would not look at him. So then he went down on his knees, and pushed his bearded face under hers. When little Eve saw this she could not restrain herself ; she put her hands on each side of his face, and gave him a kiss. It was the first time she had ever kissed him, and quite ashamed of herself, she incontinently jumped up, and struggling away from him went to hide her face at the window, the shutters of which Mary had forgotten to put up.

“ Well, it’s all right now,” said Preston.

“ But oh ! there’s a a man,” cried Lyn, and she started back from the window.

“ A man,” said Preston, coming leisurely after her, “ Well, what of that ? have you never seen one before, or have you been more

fortunate than Diogenes, and at last discovered a *man* indeed."

"But I'm sure it's a robber, I heard Wolf growl, and then I saw some one come out of the shrubs there and run down the road. I could not see his face, and he bent down his body so I couldn't tell who it was."

"Probably some swain of Mary's, who wants to see how the gentle folks make love—eh? so as to be able to copy them."

"I am certain he had been looking in at the window."

"Just so, taking notes in fact. Well I hope he was edified."

So they thought nothing more of the man at present; but as Preston walked home his mind was very uneasy about Evelyn. "I could cure almost anything but obstinacy, the question is whether all this is obstinacy or shyness; if the former I may as well give up all hope of cultivating her mind," and he shook his head. "Her ignorance, poor thing, was not her own fault, but I was certainly not prepared for this."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day Preston, as was sometimes his wont, came down in the afternoon instead of the evening. He did not offer to do any work, so they roamed about the garden, Eve being perfectly happy hanging on his arm and occasionally teasing him in some harmless manner. At last she took him to see her favourite "green corner," but here they found Margery reading; Eve would have retreated, but an idea struck Preston, who was beginning to find the afternoon long.

"Do you ever use the punt?"

"We have not used it for years, not since Arthur left," said Margaret.

Preston tore off his coat, got into it and on his knees, and finding the scoop inside began to take out the water rapidly.

“What are you doing?” cried Eve.

“We are going to have a punting excursion,” said he, baling away.

At his orders, Margaret went one way and Eve another, and in ten minutes some large old cushions were laid in the punt, the punt-hook was rescued from the back yard, where the servants had appropriated it to hang their clothes' line on, and Margaret jumped in in great glee at the adventure. But when Preston, standing in the end of the punt, offered his hand to Evelyn, nothing would induce her to come in. Preston persuaded, Margery laughed at her; Eve herself was afraid, and so after ten minutes fruitless exhortation to pluck, Preston pushed off and left her to sit on the bank and watch them with a feeling of disappointment. Was it really timidity in the child? Was she really a child and like a child, frightened of everything which she had not tried? Or

was it so keen a jealousy that she would join in nothing where she could not have Preston all to herself? He, himself, put it down to a natural rebelliousness of spirit and this he was determined to conquer.

- Presently when Preston, running down and up the punt, had been pushing for some time, she saw Margaret get up at his invitation and receive a lesson from him in the art of punting. Meggie soon did it cleverly enough, and as Preston lying back on the cushions, clapped his hands and cried "bravo!" Eve bit her lips with jealousy. So when the punt once more came round towards her, she cried out that she now wanted to come in, and once in she seized the pole and insisted on having a lesson. Preston was only too glad to see this spirit, and though punting is by no means a very easy art, especially with crinoline to interfere with the punt-pole, Eve was soon pushing them along to the water-lilies and laughing merrily over it. He was delighted, and saw with wonder how easily and gracefully she managed it; indeed she was far

more graceful than Margaret in her movements. But when he tried to explain this readiness in learning a manœuvre and that difficulty in mastering a few lines of prose or poetry, he became very grave and confessed to himself that it was neither, after all, timidity nor obstinacy, but actual mental deficiency. This was even more difficult to cure and how should he do it?

For all those occurrences little Eve used to upbraid herself bitterly. She could not explain to herself why such obstinate whims took her. She was in constant fear that Preston would grow weary of her, and made repeated resolutions to act differently, but when the time came she invariably acted in just the same way. Nor had Preston sufficient knowledge of her character as yet to see through this. We, as author and reader, have hearts laid open before us, and we know what neither she herself nor her lover could find out. The fact was that Evelyn loved Preston much too well. She loved him so much, that anything which took him away from her or her away from him,

became hateful to her. She didn't want lessons and education, she wanted love and nothing else, and if he did not give her this in full abundance, she was miserable, and her misery showed itself in sulkiness.

Well, in the meantime it is not to be supposed that the two lovers were not at times very happy together. This was particularly the case when there was something to be done, for when alone in the winter-evenings with Evelyn, Preston would often find the time lag. True, he was never weary of fondling his little love, but he felt a want ; she could not understand him, and so his finer, better thoughts had to be suppressed, and the little common place things to assume an unnatural magnitude. In this way he felt that his engagement did not raise his mind. Evelyn, on the other hand, admitted no intellectual particle into her love. She loved *him* in person, the actual him, the Denis Preston there before her, and she would have loved him as much if he had been suddenly struck with the most hopeless idiotcy. To her

mind he presented a definite individuality, which might change in every detail, face, mind, circumstances, character and even heart, and yet be the same actual being that she loved and always would love. She loved him too after the manner of a possession. She had decidedly an acquisitive mind, and she always coveted in a quiet, unselfish way, that which she loved. So when she had him by her, it was the grossest cruelty to take him away on any pretext; and when he was away, though life were adorned with every beauty that makes heaven heaven, she was miserable. Hell would have been heaven with him, heaven hell without. Her little mind knew no larger scope; all centred on him and without him there was nothing to interest her.

But though Preston felt nothing of this devotion, he enjoyed it, and so when nothing occurred to ruffle Evelyn's spirits he was quite happy in her society. But wherever he was, he felt the want of intellect and comprehension, and endeavoured to fill it up. In their walks

he was for ever finding objects on which to talk, and to talk too after his own fashion, referring every thing to its Creator. He was always wishing to draw out her perceptive powers according to his own theory, and to do this, he would take a flower, or a twig, or a stone, what not and point out in each the evidences of design, of fitness and beauty. Even when the ground was covered with snow—and what more monotonous than snow?—he would take up a pinch of it, and show her how each flake was composed of tiny cells, scarcely visible to the eye, and how each cell was formed from a drop of water. If Evelyn had no other valuable quality, she was at least a good listener and that is a good rarity.

At other times he would tell her of his own adventures, colouring them considerably, and making very pretty romances out of them, and these Evelyn always wanted to have repeated. But one-sided conversation cannot go on very long, and in time he began to feel there was less interest about his engagement, than even in his own solitude.

Still he made some attempts yet at the education which had failed hitherto. If he was obliged to defer his system of mental training till she should acquire more confidence, he might at least give her mind the proper inclination. He began therefore with history, and if Eve had known it, she might have been proud of her tutor. He had made history his especial study, reading it philosophically, and in after years he came out as one of the first historians of his day. But little Eve, though anxious to improve, did not want history but him, and at times her attention wandered quite away, and in the middle of some valuable explanation in which his learning came to bear, she would exclaim, "Oh! do you know what Tippet did to-day?" or "Only fancy, we are all going to Launceston next week." Which exclamations completely damped the historian's ardour. Nevertheless the readings went on, and Evelyn did her best to attend to his commentary, which he certainly made as light and amusing as he could. There were now only

the Sundays to fill up, and Preston who could never bear to waste time, determined to have some readings which should be of use to them both.

He found that little Evelyn's religion—like that of many girls—was formal. Not that she was not very strict in every observance, and would have gone to church ten or twenty times on Sunday had there been so many services. Then too, in her own way, she had a great deal of faith, and in her troubles consoled herself with prayer. But Preston soon found that in all this there was more formality than spirit. He doubted if she ever meditated on the attributes of God, or *felt* Him in his works, if she ever realized his presence, or fully comprehended the fulness of His love, and in his laudable anxiety for her good, he would not overlook that of her soul. Then too about Margaret he saw a tendency to cant, and dreading lest her less "pious" sister should fall into the same way, he rejoiced to be able to give her mind a proper healthy religious bias.

Eve was quite ready for this. She was not a girl to be *bored* by religion, and for the first few Sundays she listened to him with devoted reverence, and quite charmed him with her conduct in this respect.

One Sunday, however, Evelyn happened to be in unusually high spirits and these always showed themselves in her in a rather peculiar manner. As she did not talk much, she laughed immoderately at the slightest thing, ran about and was generally restless and ready for any fun that was proposed—in short it was the mirth of a child, and a child she was. She did her best, however, to become serious when Preston opened the Bible, and for some time all went well. They were reading the second chapter of St. John, the marriage at Cana.

“This miracle,” said Preston, when they had read over the passage, “is not only the first our Lord ever performed, though some pretend, without any authority, that He had performed others in secret, but has also perhaps more important bearings than any other. Let

us look first at the facts and curiosities, so to speak, of the whole story. It was a marriage-feast, and at the bridegroom's house, not at the bride's, as with us. This was the Jewish custom, but it has also a typical meaning, as the whole miracle has, namely of the marriage of our Saviour and his church, and it is He who, as it were, receives the church, not the church Him. Next we are told that His mother and His disciples were called, that is, invited. Now from what is afterwards related, it would appear that the feast was given by some intimate friend, if not a relation, of Mary. But how do we account for his disciples being invited? Do you remember some other feast to which they were also invited?"

Evelyn thought a long time and then shook her head.

"You remember when the woman having a box of ointment washed our Lord's feet with her tears. They were there also, but then they were invited as the recognised companions of our Lord, but in this case He had not begun

His public ministry, He had only just called some of His disciples, so we must suppose that as they were almost all inhabitants of the villages round about, they were friends too of the bridegroom. You remember where Cana was?"

"No," with a sigh.

"In Galilee, and no great distance from Nazareth and Capernaum. Then there is one more fact to be noticed. The waterpots were not for holding water to drink, but water for washing, and this is note worthy, because it shows how great the confidence—or faith—of the servants must have been when they, obeying our Lord, drew out from them to drink. Now we come to the difficulties of—"

At this moment, the fire, as fires do at times, suddenly shot out a bit of coal with a loud explosion, and this set Evelyn off. It was some minutes before she could be sobered again, and then Preston went on.

"The main difficulty is that Mary should have applied to our Lord at all, and the question is what she meant by telling him of the

want of wine. After considering the question last night when I carefully read this chapter, I have come to the conclusion that there is only one explanation of the matter ; Mary was prompted by faith. You see that our Lord answered her with a rebuff, yet in spite of that, she tells the servants to obey him, as if expecting him to do something. Her remark, therefore, cannot be understood as a proposal that they should leave the feast, as some have thought ; nor have we any right to imagine with others that our Lord warned her of what he would do. If so, why His rebuke ? Really, Evelyn, there is nothing to laugh at."

She was off again at the mere remembrance of that coal. Her attention was quite gone ; she hadn't heard a word he was saying, and the attempt to suppress her laughter only made it worse. He went on, however, with exemplary patience.

"This faith in Mary is a most beautiful instance. Our Lord had not yet declared himself, and yet she, His mother, His own mother, believed in Him. You remember how she is

said to have cherished in her heart the announcement of the angel and the early acts of our Lord. Well, now, at last we find her acting upon them in perfect faith in His power and His mercy. One is at first surprised that our Lord should reply to her in such a tone, but this too contains a deep important lesson. He was now about to perform His first work, now to declare Himself no longer the mere carpenter's son, and in doing so He is determined to show that mere works of affinity are nothing in the work of God. He who said "He who hateth not father nor mother for my sake, cannot be my disciple," Himself began His ministry, not by a complete breach of human ties, but by showing that they could not influence His actions, that His motive was a far higher one than to please His mother. And this, Evelyn, is a lesson that comes home to us all, and when we find relations standing in the way of our salvation or our work, we are bound to give them up—to cut off our right hand and pluck out our right eye—rather than our work

with God. To put it familiarly to you, if I ever thought that instead of raising me and aiding me, you would draw me down to the world and make me worldly, I should not marry you, however great the sacrifice."

"Oh ! but you will never do that ; oh ! please don't."

"No, no, I only made it an illustration. To go on now ; how was it that the wine was deficient. Some suppose that the arrival of the disciples was not provided for, and yet we are told that they were called to the feast. I think it is much more natural to imagine that these people were not rich, being in the same station as our Lord and His disciples, that they had provided their best, but had no more to give. The remark of the ruler of the feast about the wine, seems to show that the wine provided by the bridegroom had not been very good. It is pleasing to think that the first evidence of our Saviour's divinity was shown at the house of a poor man, since He came to preach the

gospel to the poor. But now we come to the main—but what is the matter?”

Evelyn was nearly down, but regained her balance in time. She had been tilting her chair forward, and it had at last slipped. Of course this produced a fit which was almost hysterical, since she laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“I was nearly killed, hay, hay, hay, ho, ho, ho; I shall never stop laughing, he, he, he, hay, hay, hay.”

“Come, there is nothing so very laughable after all. You must sit quietly this time,” it was evident he was beginning to lose patience. “So now to resume. The main difficulty and one about which there has been much discussion is in the encouragement which our Saviour is supposed to give to drinking, or at least to banqueting. That expression ‘well drunken’ which is in Greek *μεθυσθῶσι*.”

“What? oh what a word, hey! hey! hey!”

“Don’t be silly, Eve. It means really, ‘when they have begun to be drunk,’ and hence

some antagonists of Christianity have suggested that the guests at this feast were in that state, and that our Saviour countenanced and even aided their intoxication. But the remark is in reality a general one, and we have no right to apply it to this feast. Of one thing we may be certain, that if it were possible that our spotless sinless Saviour should have encouraged drunkenness in others, his apostle would have taken care to conceal the fact. The very simplicity with which St. John gives the saying of the governor of the feast, proves that not even the idea of such a thing had entered his head. If, as the enemies of Christ declare, our Lord shows in this case that he was not a good man, he must have been an impostor ; but if he were an impostor, John was either an accomplice or a dupe. If an accomplice, he would have been more careful than to have left such a loop-hole as this for detection, if a dupe, he must have seen in writing this that Jesus was not a perfect man. No, the fact is there was no such encouragement, and therefore

St. John had no suspicions that his story would ever be taken in such a light. The supplying of the wine was an act of kindness to people who could not afford a sufficient amount for all the guests, and not an encouragement to wine-bibbers. There is a lesson in what follows that is rather striking. The bridegroom, you see, does not show *his* surprise at the supply of wine, as the ruler of the feast does, but quietly takes the compliment of the ruler to himself. How like mankind ! how foolish it is for people to pride themselves on wealth, birth, or what not, since it is God's hand that supplies them with these. And if men saw the hand of God so supplying us, as those servants witnessed the miracle done by Christ, how mean would our pride and glorying appear ; how shabby we should seem in taking to ourselves the honour of what is not ours, but only lent us for our sojourn on earth. Well, now we come to the great lesson to be—"

Suddenly Evelyn started up, shrieked, and ran round the room, laughing and screaming

alternately. Preston leaned back in his chair in despair. Evelyn ran round the table, and then plumping down on the ground by his side, buried her head in his waistcoat, and laughed for full five minutes. Preston's face grew black.

"What is it this time?" said he, lifting her up from him not over affectionately.

"Hey! hey! hey! he! he! he! oh!"

"Do speak, or get up, or something."

"Oh dear me, I am nearly dead with laughing; I've such a frightful stitch in my side; oh! oh! oh!"

"What is it all about?"

"Something got hold of my toe—hey! hey! hey!—a cat or something; yes, there it is; ha! ha! ha! hiss! hiss!—go out, get away—oh I do so hate cats; hey! hey! hey!"

At last the animal was driven from the room.

"I think you are tired of listening to me," said Preston coldly, "it is almost time for me to go."

“Oh, no, no, you shan’t go, cruel thing. Now, if you will go on, I will really be quiet,” a promise which she broke directly afterwards two or three times, while Preston went on, paying her no attention.

“We, as Christians, derive from this story, and from others in our Saviour’s life, the grand truth that our religion is one of everyday life, not of asceticism and retirement from the world. It is not the gloomy faith of the Calvinist, nor the renunciation of the Romanist. In this the first occasion of our Lord’s declaration of his divinity, he has not only countenanced marriage, but a marriage-feast; not only showed us that we may be natural here in this life, but that we may even be merry and enjoy the good gifts of God without abusing them.”

“Then why are you a hermit?”

“Am I? No, my sweet, there are other reasons for my leaving temptation, though I have not renounced the world. I should not be here now if I were a true ascetic. But

enough of me. It is curious to notice that among the professors of Christianity there has always been one party which looked upon even innocent enjoyment and mirth as stupid. There is still such a party, and a very large one in this country. But what is our Lord's example on the subject? He had no necessity to go to the feasts and banquets. He did attend during His ministry. He could preach, or work miracles as well or better in the street or the temple. Why then did he go to them, instead, like John, of remaining in the wilderness, whither thousands would have thronged to him? Why, indeed, if not to show men that there is no sin in innocent enjoyment, and that there is more courage in meeting a temptation and resisting it, than in withdrawing oneself entirely from the range of it. There is more true virtue in the moderate use of wine than in total abstinence."

"Then why do you drink only water? ah!"

"There, too, I have my own reasons, madame. I may do as an exercise of character

what I should not establish as a principle. Alford says of total abstinence that to refuse 'the bounty to save the trouble of seeking the grace is an attempt which must ever end in degradation of the individual motives and in social demoralization.' That is very strong; but, I think, almost true."

"Oh! listen," cried Evelyn suddenly, and then burst into a fresh titter.

A fearful row came from the hall. The expelled cat had wandered, arching her back and rubbing her sides against the wall, as far as the porch, in which, since the cold weather had set in, Wolf had been permitted to lie, waiting for his master. The hound had caught sight of and rushed upon the cat, who scampered hissing violently down the hall, followed by Wolf as far as the kitchen door, where the cook, who loved her tabby more than life, met the dog with a rolling-pin, and quickly put him to a contemptible retreat. The sound of all this proceeding was intensely amusing to Evelyn, but not of the same lively interest to her instructor.

"Well," he said quietly, looking at his watch, "it is near ten, so good night."

"Oh! no, no, no, cruel thing, you must not go." He had got up, but she clung to him and pulled him down again. "Do go on, and I will be so very good."

"So you said before."

"But now I mean it. Oh! do go on; I won't even smile again."

"Well, I will finish and then go; and I hope you will keep your promise, for I tell you, Evelyn, I am quite sick of this nonsense."

She looked so sad at this rebuke, that he drew her towards him and laid her head on his shoulder, while he went on.

"What I was going to say is this: that just as now there are men who condemn all innocent amusement, and tell us it is wrong to dance or entertain our friends, so in our Saviour's day there were people who could accuse Him of levity and even sin because he countenanced a mirthful life. He who was so poor that He had not where to lay His head, He whose disciples

went into the desert with no more provision than five barley loaves and a few small fishes, He who fasted forty days and forty nights was accused by the gloomy Calvinists of those days of being a glutton and a wine-bibber. What is it, sweet?"

She had shrunk closer towards him and was staring in terror at the window, yet not daring to interrupt him. He looked up at the window and distinctly saw outside it a figure of a man looking in at them. He was tall, and very thin; but they could not see his face, for he had pulled his cap down over it. Preston leapt up. It seemed like the figure he had noticed once before; and so he rushed to the window and threw it up. The man, of course, was gone. There were shrubs close to the window, and he could pass through them to the road. Still Preston thought this impudence too suspicious to be overlooked, and jumping out of window, he hunted in vain for the mysterious visitant, while Eve in the greatest anxiety waited at the window. At last he came back.

"No trace of him. It is very mysterious. I wish you could find out if Mary, or the cook really has a follower who takes it into his head to come and watch us. At any rate we will have the shutters closed to-morrow."

"What time shall you come to-morrow?"

"The usual hour—seven. We can go on with Sharon Turner; and to-morrow you will really repeat the 'Skylark' for me, won't you, Lyn?"

"Do please come a little earlier to-morrow, you were so late on Saturday; and—and I'm afraid I have been very silly to-night. I won't be so to-morrow, if you will come earlier."

How could he scold her after this? He only pressed her to his bosom, called her "sweetheart," and went his way, to the extreme delight of Wolf.

The next morning all the Marfield party were surprised soon after breakfast to see Mr. Wytham balance into the room. Mr. Wytham's exterior had been considerably beautified during his long stay in town. He had a new dark

blue frock coat, a new buff waistcoat, and a pair of trousers that approached most alarmingly to modern make and pattern. In short he was quite brushed up, and approached Miss Margaret with more gallantry in his swing than ever.

"Aha, Miss Margaret, I hope I see you thriving, rosy as usual; dear me, how charming after the dust and dirt of London. Quite sick of it, Colonel; only went up to get out of the way of the hunting; can't afford a new horse, Miss Margaret, with this heavy income tax, and really people expect me to hunt when one is in the country. Now the season's more than half over, they'll leave me alone."

"It was very shabby of you not to run down for Christmas, Wytham," said the Colonel.

"Yes, we missed you," added Margaret. "It is the first time for two years that you have not been there."

"Does the 'we' include yourself, Miss Margaret," he asked bowing gallantly, and lowering his voice.

"Oh! no. I had Mr. Preston to talk to; he took your place."

Mr. Wytham's face fell like a dog's tail at an angry word.

"Mr. Preston," said he with something of a sneer. "Was he here? I saw him in town."

"Oh! yes, but he had more grace than some people and took care to come down for Christmas."

"Humph, not too soon either," muttered Wytham ill-temperedly. "Is he here now?"

"In the house? Oh! no. I don't allow him to come till the evening," said Margery, delighted to tantalize the old bachelor, "but he is very regular at our tea-table."

"Hum; you might do better. By the way, Colonel, if you can spare half an hour, I should like to have a talk to you about this same Captain Preston. You don't perhaps know he is a captain, Margaret, so much the more attractive, nothing so taking as a captain with young ladies."

"Oh! he is quite attractive enough already,

"I assure you," said she, drawing Evelyn out of the room.

The Colonel was on thorns. He had not told Wytham of the engagement, and no one in the village knew of it as yet. He dreaded Wytham; he never could confess to him, after his promise to him, and he positively shrank before the wiry little bachelor. Wytham, on the other hand, had come down with no very hostile intent. He would tell the Colonel what he knew, but he could do so at any time; it was not very important. But when he learned that Preston had returned to the Wynch, nay, had spent Christmas at Marfield and since became a regular visitor; when he discovered, as he thought, such clear indications that Miss Margaret vouchsafed him her favour, when he felt that he himself returning to Wilton full of matrimonial, or at least very domestic ideas, had been ousted and shelved by a base interloper, Mr. Wytham resolved to do his worst and did it too.

"What can it be, Meg dear?" asked Eve

in great anxiety, as they left the room, "what can he want to say to papa?"

"Oh! only some of his club-gossip, child. You need not be afraid. He is an old humbug, and papa knows him well."

Not at all satisfied about this, Eve waited in the drawing-room, practising for the hundredth time a very old piece, and listening eagerly for Mr. Wytham's departure. After more than an hour, she heard the dining room bell ring, and stopped playing. Mary went to answer it, and presently came out again with a note.

"Who is that for, Mary?" asked Eve eagerly, coming into the passage.

"For Mr. Preston, Miss; James has got to take it up at once."

At this news Evelyn turned deadly pale, she felt certain there was something wrong. She longed to tear open this note, but that would be very wrong. She looked at the direction, however, and saw her father's handwriting. What did it mean? She had no time for thinking though, for just then Mr. Wytham and the

Colonel came out of the dining-room, the latter looking very stern and very much annoyed. Wytham, well satisfied, balanced away again, and the Colonel told her in a stern cold voice to send Margaret to the dining-room. This conference lasted even longer than the other, and Margaret looked so solemn when it was over that Eve had not the courage to ask her a word about the affair. Poor thing, what a wretched day of anxiety she passed. At lunch neither the Colonel nor Margaret spoke a word. After lunch Eve ran to see if James had come back. Yes, he had seen Mr. Preston, who said he would send an answer before the evening. Send an answer! then perhaps he would not come. She waited about the house all the afternoon, asking repeatedly if there was any note from Mr. Preston, but in vain. At dinner there was nearly the same silence; neither of them said a word to her, and she felt certain some great misery was coming. Six o'clock, then seven came, and then as usual she took up her post at the dining-room window to wait

for Preston. She knew the "Sky-lark" so well to-night; she had made up her mind to be so very good and sensible, and now it was half past seven and he was not here. Soon it was eight o'clock and he did not come.

She had left the door open to hear Mary when he should bring his letter, but at half past eight as it struck on the rich-toned bell of the old clock on the stairs, there had been no note at all; this, however, gave her hope, for he would either write or come. He had often been half an hour and sometimes even an hour late; for once in a way he might be even two hours late. She sat without a candle in that low-ceilinged room with its panels of deep-stained oak. The fire threw a fitful glare over it, and the house was very silent beyond. Outside the window the night was very dark, and yet it was there that all her interest lay and this that her eyes strained to penetrate. She listened in vain for his step on the gravel, and at last when the big clock tolled nine times and the cuckoo clock in the kitchen echoed it like

a cuckoo that had gone hopelessly insane, she began to give up all hope.

She had just done so, when she heard a step on the walk, and in her eagerness threw up the window.

"Is that Mr. Preston?" she cried, she never called him Denis.

"All right," answered a voice, but not his. It was much hoarser. She waited a minute in doubt.

"Who is it?" she asked timidly, as the figure came nearer.

"It's me, my dear."

"Why do you speak so funnily?"

The figure stopped near the window. The night was so dark, and the fire so low that she could not see him, but she had her misgivings.

"Do make haste," she said, "I am catching cold. Oh! how could you be so very late?"

The figure moved a step forward. Evelyn was not superstitious, but this frightened her, and she shrank back.

"Evelyn," said the figure, "I am his ghost, he is dead."

She still thought he was playing her a trick, and she leaned forward to touch him. He bent down and kissed her cheek. She started up in fury and disgust. The face that had kissed her was not his, she knew it well enough, for there was no beard!

She had just strength enough to slam down the window, and then ran panting with indignation to the drawing-room, where she gasped out the story,

"Oh! I am sure it is some horrid wretch," she added when she had ended, "for we have several times seen a figure about the house. Oh! papa, oh! Meg, dear, promise you will never tell Mr. Preston."

The Colonel rose in great indignation, summoned James, and bid him go round the premises with a lantern. Then he questioned Evelyn, as to the former appearances, the sound of the voice and so forth, and then when James returning declared he had seen no one—when the

maids being summoned, protested with indignation that the "followers" whom the Colonel weakly allowed to come to the house, had not been there for some days and would, they were certain, never do such a thing as that, there was nothing left for it but conjecture and an order to close the dining-room shutters every evening.

Still the little event was a boon to Eve, for it gave her something else to think of than Preston's absence. Any other girl would have now boldly questioned her father about this unaccountable truancy, but Evelyn neither dared nor would do so. She only went up to her room and took out the few silly relics that reminded her of him, the books and little presents he had given her, the scraps of paper on which he had chanced to write a few words and which she carefully preserved, and then feeling that something dreadful would occur to-morrow, she resigned herself to the worst.

"It is odd that he does not write," said Margaret, when Eve was gone. "What did you say in your letter?"

"I have a copy of it somewhere in my pocket—ah, here it is."

"Dear Sir."

"That is rather stiff," said Margery.

"Not enough so, if all is true."

"Dear Sir,

"I have been pained this morning by information which I have received from London. I cannot as yet credit it, though the authority on which it is given, is the most reliable that could be. I am most unwilling to believe a word of it, in spite of all evidence, and I sincerely trust that you will be able to refute, or at least explain every item of the charges made against you. I will at once therefore lay them before you. Of the information concerning your life previous to our acquaintance, I say nothing, for I have no right to enquire into it. Whatever it may have been, I have seen nothing in your conduct here but what is most reassuring, and had I done so for a moment, I could never have allowed our acquaintance to

mature into intimacy. But it would seem that long after you had been received here on terms of close friendship, and immediately before your offer for the hand of Evelyn, you were leading in London a life which I shall not stigmatise too harshly by the word disreputable. I am told that for many years you have been a gamester, well known unfortunately for your extraordinary success, and that during your visit to London you resumed this most depraving habit. I am assured also that you are well known at the clubs in this character, that your retirement to this secluded part of the country was owing to your having squandered an excellent fortune at the gaming-table, and that your companions and friends are men who have been tabooed in good society. Nor is this all, a friend of mine of whose veracity I have never had reason to doubt in an intimacy of more than ten years, affirms having seen you driving in the Park and other public places with a person by your side whose appearance stamped her as an actress. What painful inferences I am

compelled to draw from these reports, I leave to you to imagine. There may be some mistake in all this, or there may be an exaggeration, and for the sake of my poor child I most earnestly trust that such is the case. I look to you to relieve the anxiety of my mind at once. I have not told Evelyn a word of these reports, but unless they are fully and unreservedly refuted, I must solemnly warn you, that whatever the misery it will entail upon her, your engagement must cease at once and for ever.

“I am, dear Sir,

“Faithfully yours

“RODERICK MORDAUNT.”

And this letter Preston had not answered.

CHAPTER X.

IN his interview with Mr. Wytham, the Colonel had carefully avoided giving the slightest hint of the engagement, but he had not been able to conceal his grief and anxiety at the first reports. Wytham had noticed this, and became convinced that the flirtation between Margaret and Preston must have gone very far, and been observed by the worthy Colonel. With this idea in his head, the little man had been worked up to fury, and naturally embellished his story, bad enough already; and when the Colonel exclaimed, "Wytham, if all this is true, that man must never enter my house again," and when he had proposed to write at once to Preston and tell him everything

he had heard, Wytham fully concurred in the proposal, only stipulating that his name should never on any consideration be brought in. He had then departed, satisfied that he had routed the enemy, and cleared the field once more for himself.

But let it not be thought that Mr. Wytham was a spiteful man. He really believed the reports he had heard, and his first anxiety had been to relieve the Colonel of a disreputable acquaintance; it was only when he found how matters stood with Margaret, that he had felt a personal interest in his rival's discomfiture.

The next morning when they were at breakfast, a note was brought in. Evelyn turned pale, and fixed her eyes on the Colonel, whose hand trembled as he broke the seal. She saw his face look black at first, then clear up a little; but when he came to the end of the note, his brows knit, and raising his eyes curiously to Evelyn, he shook his head slowly. She felt as if this was her death blow.

Then the Colonel rose, and motioned to

Margaret to go with him to his study. Eve crouched down on a stool by the fire, and waited in misery and doubt. Surely they would not long keep it from her, whatever it was. Something was wrong, very wrong, that was clear, but it must now be cleared up one way or the other ; oh, how she hated Mr. Wytham now.

She waited for nearly half an hour, doing nothing, except that in absence of mind she took the comb out of her pocket and smoothed her hair, and then at last she heard the Colonel and Margaret returning to the dining-room. She trembled, for now the dread moment was coming ; they would tell her some of those awful things she had imagined through the long night. It would appear that Mr. Preston was privately married, or that he had loved somebody else, or that he had done something very wicked.

The Colonel took his seat solemnly ; Margaret, touched by her sister's woful face, sat down on the chair beside her, and put her arm on her shoulder, as if to support her.

"Evelyn," said her father gravely, "I wish you to tell me how Mr. Preston has treated you lately?"

At this her spirits revived. If that was all, she would soon set it right.

"Oh, papa dear, he is always so very, very kind to me."

"And have you had— Now, Eve, I don't want to inquire into your private matters, but something has occurred which makes this question necessary—have you had lately any serious quarrel between you?"

"We never have, indeed we never have," she answered eagerly; "that is—" there she hesitated. Margaret glanced at the Colonel.

"Well, tell us, Lyn; it will facilitate matters," said the latter, more kindly.

Lyn looked down, apparently examining the corners of her pocket-handkerchief, and muttered something quite inaudible.

"What is it?"

"I mean that I have been very silly sometimes, and he has scolded me; but—but—it was always my fault."

"Ah, just so ; now it is coming out. Then you *have* had a quarrel?"

"Oh no, Mr. Preston only— It was all right afterwards, and I quite deserved it. It was because I was very obstinate with him."

"And what did he do?"

"He only went away, but he came back again." (That mark on the handkerchief seemed to be very interesting.)

The other two knew they should not get a clearer account of the affair from Eve, and they had found out what they wanted, viz., that there had been some disagreement between them. The Colonel braced himself up to go on.

"Evelyn," said he, "are you still as fond as ever of Mr. Preston?"

She did not answer this, but blushing deeply, bowed her head down over her knees.

"And should you still be so, if you heard he was a bad man?"

"Yes," in a very low voice.

"What? you could love an enemy of God?" (very sternly).

"I—I should never believe it."

"Not if he confessed it himself?" (severely).

At this she started half up, but instantly checked herself, only staring with her large eyes at the Colonel with a scared look.

"What has he confessed?" she asked in a deep, almost determined voice.

"You shall see directly. Answer me one more question. If Mr. Preston confessed to a disreputable life, would you be ready to break off your engagement?"

"I never would, I couldn't." And then as if this idea, which she had been waiting for, had given the signal, she burst into a fit of violent tears, and buried her head in her sister's lap. Margery stroked her sister's sunny hair, and looked unhappy, and when the Colonel was about to speak again, motioned to him to wait. She was soon calm again, though the tears flowed for a long time afterwards; and the Colonel silently handed her Preston's letter to read. Her hands trembled as she took it, and pushing back her hair from her face, she

read it indistinctly through her tears. The Colonel and Margaret had certainly a right to wonder at the indifference of its tone, but Eve did not see it at all in that light.

“Dear Colonel Mordaunt,

“With the exception of two absurd mistakes, your informant is correct in his facts—not in the colouring given to them. I have not squandered my fortune in gaming,” (here Eve started violently), “but made it over to a society engaged in a national object, as I explained to you. It is difficult to see how I could enjoy the invariable success mentioned by your informant, and yet lose a fortune of £80,000. My companions would not be flattered at your description. So far from being tabooed, my best London friends must be known to you by name, and probably by reputation. My two intimates are Anthony Hibberd, the Member for V——, and Henry Cunliffe, the eldest son of Sir Baldwin Cunliffe. Among my acquaintance, Lord A——

H——, and Colonel W——,” (the blanks were filled up with two well known names), “are the most intimate. No man can live long in the world without amassing a multitude of acquaintances, among whom may be several black sheep; but surely a man should be judged of rather by his friends than his casual acquaintance. The most serious charge is founded on a mistake, which I am inclined to consider a very stupid one in your informant. The lady he refers to is not only not an actress, but in no respects like one. Though I must stipulate that her name is not further brought into this affair, I will for your satisfaction state who she is: she is La Contessa Manetta, widow of that General Manetta who died so bravely fighting against the Austrians at Rivoli. She herself was compelled to leave Italy on account of her political opinions, and her husband’s ‘crime.’ I knew her in Florence twelve years ago, and consider her as one of my best friends in some respects.”

“Papa, I would rather not read any more,

if you please," Evelyn here said, with a look which was very like indignation, a most unusual expression for humble little Eve, but it died away again directly.

"I wish you to read to the end, and see what is said about yourself."

She therefore went on.

"The charge of having been once a gambler is not without foundation." (Eve heaved a deep sigh.) "When my father died I gave up this habit, and with a view to breaking it entirely went abroad and entered upon serious pursuits. I confess that I have often relapsed for a time into this unmanly habit, and it was to escape all temptation to it that I came down to the Wynch. I wished to test my powers of resistance in going up to town in September, and my failure only proves to me how essential it is for me to marry and settle down to a quiet country life. You are now in possession of the truth of the case, and you will admit that I have never denied, but often stated to yourself and your daughters,

that my retirement in the country was undertaken with a view to curing myself of evil tendencies. Of my life here you have seen sufficient to judge what kind of man I am in heart ; but if you think this confessed tendency a sufficient reason for breaking off my engagement with Evelyn, I must abide by your decision. I have lately thought that the disparity between my age and Evelyn's, raised some objections in the way of that perfect confidence and mutual understanding without which no marriage can be happy. I am a man of formed character and ideas, and it must be trying to so young a girl to have to mould herself to mine." (Evelyn sobbing violently shook her head.) " Perhaps, too, the temper of a man accustomed to the society of the world may not be sufficiently mild for the treatment of a character so little developed as Evelyn's. However, therefore, I might feel the blow, it would perhaps be better that it should not be spared ; but I trust that the decision will be left to Evelyn herself, without whose free

consent I could not allow the engagement to cease.

“ Believe me, very sincerely yours,

“ DENIS PRESTON.”

Her tears flowed so fast that the name danced before her eyes ; but she still held the letter, gazing at his signature.

“ Well, Evelyn, you see it is a cold letter. Mr. Preston wishes to break off the engagement. What do you say ?”

“ Oh ! papa, will you please let me decide, as he asks.”

“ But he confesses to being a gambler.”

Now though Evelyn had very indistinct ideas of the sin of gambling, she had read of its horrors in novels, and pictured to herself a man who ended by blowing his brains out over a gaming table. She could instantly have forgiven much worse vices than this in Preston. They would not have altered him in her eyes, but her main idea now was, “ If I give him up, he is lost ; if I hold to him I may reform him yet.”

"He will never do it again, I am sure," she murmured. Then she came to the Colonel's chair, knelt down by his side and said through her tears, "oh papa, please, please let me keep it on—oh, please do."

"I fear, Evelyn, I cannot allow it ; it is not right, since your future happiness depends on it, whatever you may feel at present."

She then laid her head on the arm of the chair, and seemed quiet for a minute or two, while Margaret and the Colonel exchanged looks and doubted what to do. But it was the calm before a storm. This long anxiety of a day and night had weakened the poor child, and now despair came to crown it all. She got up turning her face away and blurted out : "Oh ! if I had never been so—so silly—it is all my—my—" and then she laughed and sobbed by turns and became quite hysterical. Margaret got some wine from the cellaret and made her drink it. Then she made her sit down in the arm-chair, and for a while she was quieter. The Colonel drew Margaret to

the window and they talked it over in a whisper.

"It will break her heart," said Margaret more than once.

"She is far too young to marry a man of these tendencies."

"It will make her very ill;—it will kill her."

This view told upon the Colonel's heart, and eventually it was decided to leave it to Eve and Preston to settle between them. It was even thought best that she should write to him telling him what she thought. When she heard this she could not hide her delight, and the joy came out through the tears like sunshine through rain. She kissed her father and Margaret, and rushed up stairs to pen that first letter—perhaps the last. It took her the whole morning to write. First, there was one rough copy in pencil. This began "my own dearest Denis," and ended "your loving child." She was afraid this was too affectionate—too forward. She read over his letter again, for she had kept it and meant

to keep it for ever, if she might. So the next rough copy began "my dear Mr. Preston," which she afterwards changed to "my dearest Mr. Preston," and ended, "very affectionately yours." Then there was one clean copy neatly written, but it did not please her. She had a careful store of paper of different colours, and she hesitated long which to choose, deciding at last in favour of pink. At length she brought this great labour to a close, and dispatched by James with her first love-letter.

"My dearest Mr. Preston,

"Papa made me read your letter, and he says you want to break off our engagement. I do not wonder at it, because I have been so very silly and naughty lately, and I am sure you must hate me. But as you do not say you want to break it off, I still hope you may perhaps forgive me, if I promise never, *never* to be silly again and always to do what you wish me to. If you really wish to break it off, I suppose I must bear it, but it has made me so

very unhappy and I shall *never* forget you, and never love anybody else. Oh! Mr. Preston, will you tell me if you really must break it off, and will you please forgive me all my very foolish conduct. I don't believe anything they say about you and never will, and it would not matter to me if it was true. I will really try and be very good if you will only love me once more, and I will always be so obedient and try and make you very happy, if you will only say you forgive me. Oh! do please forgive me this once, and I will never vex you again. Papa has left it to me to decide. You well know I could never break it off whatever you had done. Oh! *please* write at once, I am so very miserable, and believe me,

“Most affectionately your’s

“EVELYN.”

One would have thought from this that Preston was the complainant and she the culprit. Poor little Eve, she never thought of blaming any one but herself.

An hour later James brought her the wished for answer, which she tore open eagerly.

“ I am waiting for you at the garden gate. Come at once. D. P.”

She put on her hat in a second, and rushed out with the traces of tears still on her face. At the gate she found him and rushed into his arms, as if he had been kept from her for years. Then they walked round and round under the cedars, talking it all over. He told her a long history, how that while his father lived he had been sent into the army into an expensive regiment with an insufficient allowance; that being then very young he had been thus tempted to play, and always with such fatal success that he went on and on, seldom loosing; how that he broken through the habit again and again, and eventually sold out to escape the temptation, and how that again and again he had been drawn into it for a time. Then he came to speak about her, and told her all his fears as one after another he had found out her peculiarities of character. Then she

clung closer to him and wept in silence, and he cheered her up and told her again and again how he loved her, and how noble he had thought her conduct, and so at last they were happy once more.

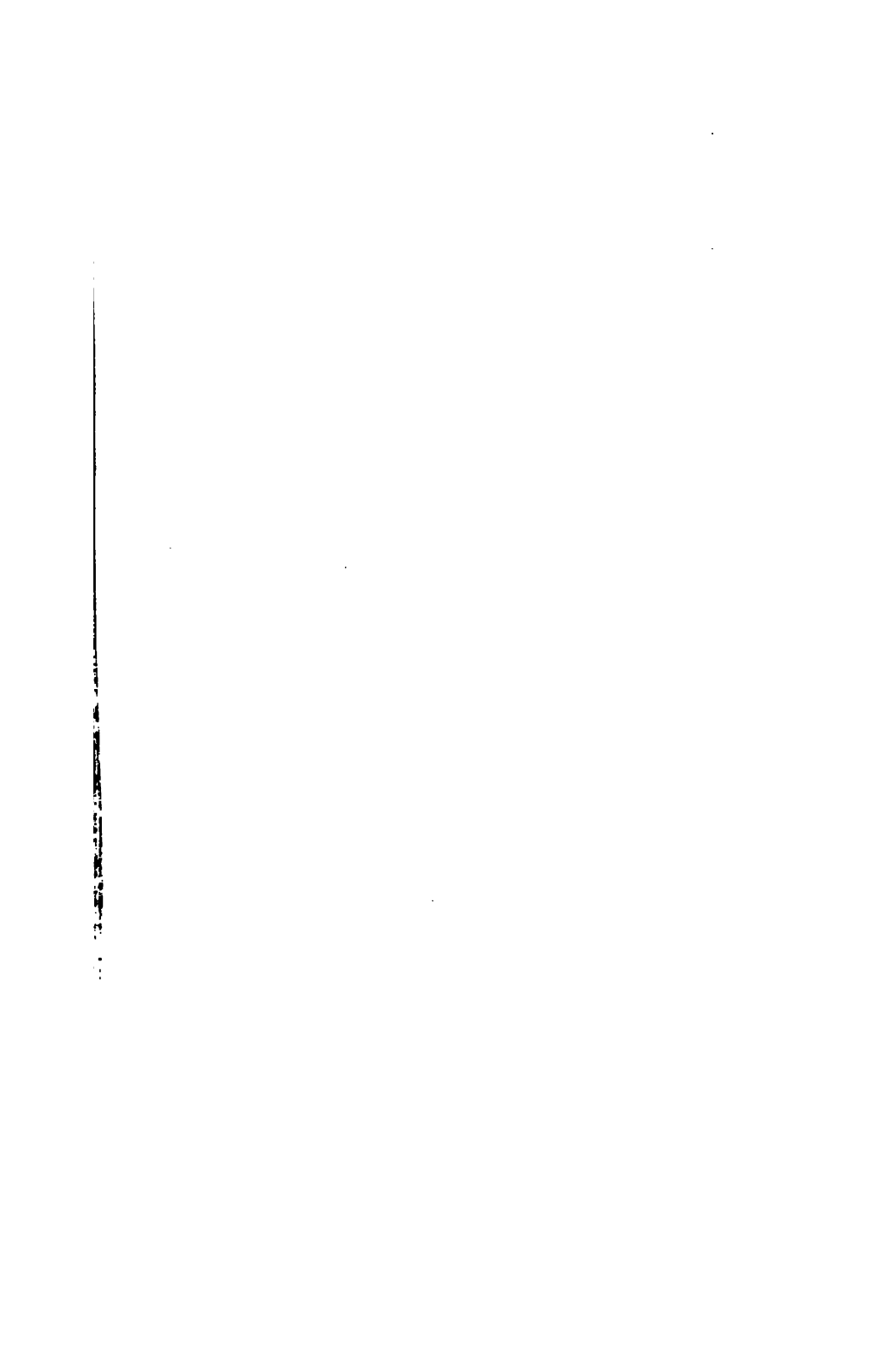
But this misery was sent, like all misery, to do much good. Evelyn resolutely determined to be very different for the future, and Preston resolved to treat her with more gentleness and try softer methods with her, and for a time this succeeded.

END OF VOL. I.

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